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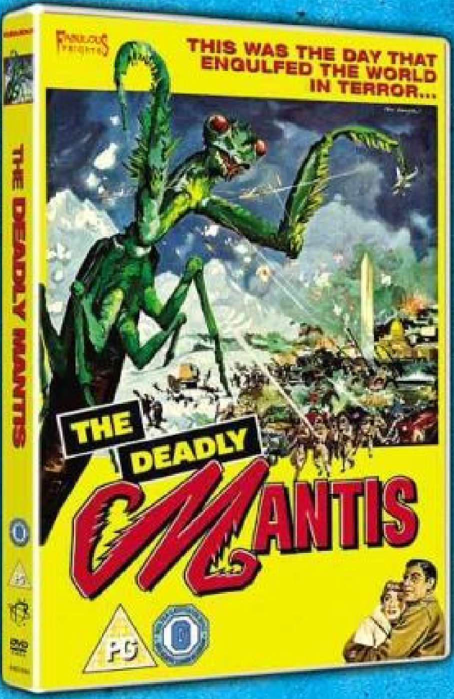
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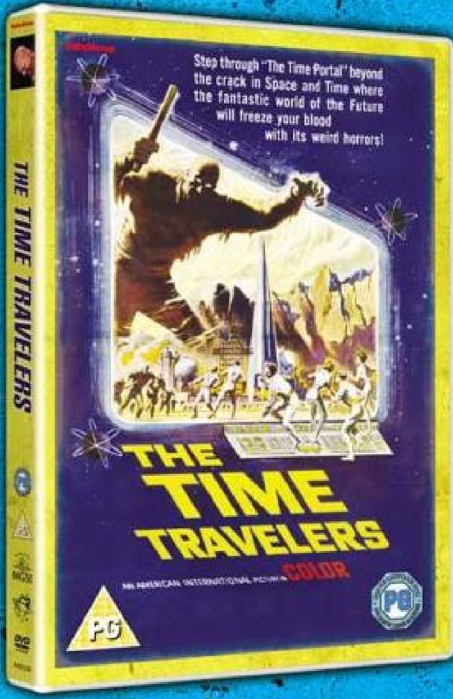
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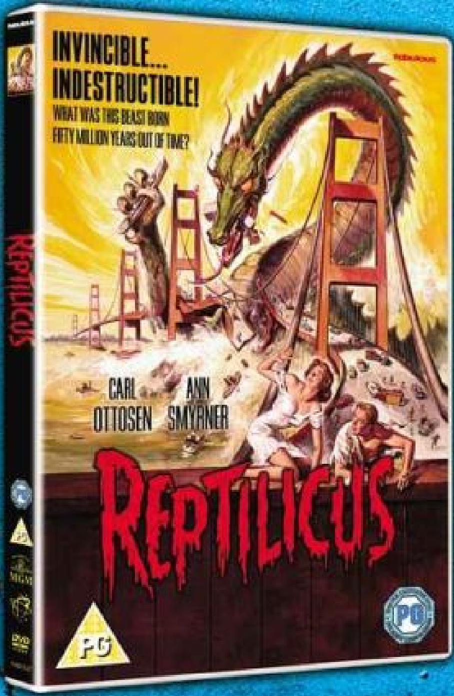
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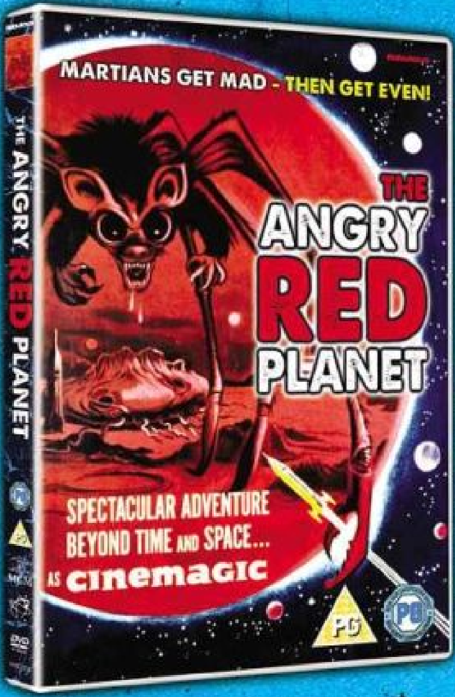
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THE ANGRY RED PLANET
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THE BEAST WITH 1,000,000 EYES!
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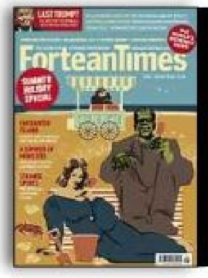

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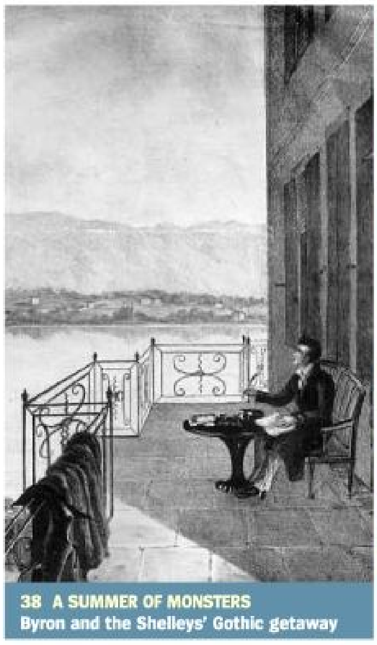

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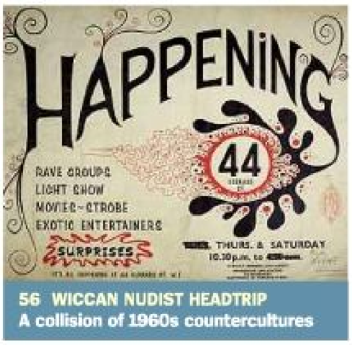

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A collision of 1960s countercultures

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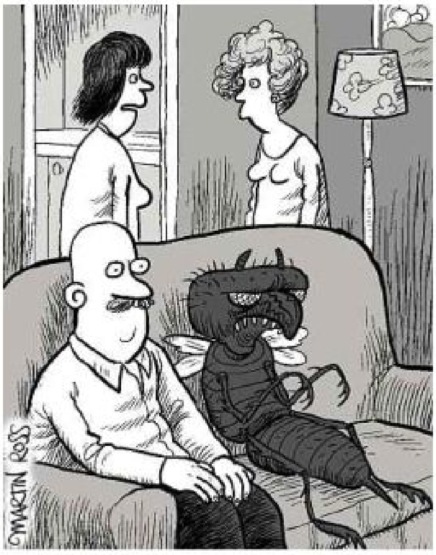
editorial

Summer Special

END OF THE WORLD NEWS

As the UK continues its meltdown into political chaos, we look across the Pond to cheer ourselves up – and find only more madness. If things are bad here, then what are we to make of the millennialist chatter Ted Harrison finds surrounding US Presidential hopeful Donald Trump? (see p55) Plenty of political pundits have supplied their own prophecies of doom concerning what might happen should the never-far-from-the-news rogue Republican somehow make his way to the Oval Office, but these have remained largely within the realm of worldly affairs. However, as Ted notes, there has also been growing discussion about the Donald's End-of-the-Worldly impact, from the retired firefighter turned prophet who believes opposition to Trump to be demonically inspired to those turning to the cryptic texts of Nostradamus to find out whether they predict the triumph or downfall of a man seen variously as America's saviour or the Antichrist. Politics, on both sides of the Atlantic, promises to remain all too interesting.



"Alf's come back from the holiday with this awful bug"

POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

Perhaps by the time you hold this issue in your hands, things will have calmed down sufficiently for your thoughts to turn to the Summer Holidays. Perhaps you're contemplating a trip to that age-old favourite of British holidaymakers, the Isle of Wight? Who doesn't have pleasant memories of such fortean diversions as Brading's Wax Museum, the multi-coloured sands of Alum Bay or the prehistoric monsters that made Blackgang Chine the Jurassic World of its day?

The happy recollections of us grockles are all very well, but we turned to one of the island's native sons for an insight into its deeper mysteries: leys, megaliths, hauntings and timeslips are all to be found once you scratch the Isle's undoubtedly picturesque surface, as Roger Clarke reveals in his highly personal psychogeographical jaunt around the scenes of his youth (p30).

If sport's more in your line, then Rob Gandy's visit to the Wenlock Olympian Games (p46) – Britain's answer to Rio's Olympics – may provide inspiration for a trip to the beautiful Shropshire countryside. And travelling further afield to Switzerland, Maria J Perez Cuervo celebrates the bicentenary of the fateful summer that Lord Byron, the Shelleys and their party spent on the shores of Lake Geneva. The weather may not have been up to much – 1816 was famously the 'Year without a Summer' – but in terms of literary inspiration it was quite the holiday, giving birth to both Frankenstein and the modern vampire (p38).

CAREFUL WITH THAT AXE, EUGENE

Much has been written, in these pages and elsewhere, about the two-way traffic between Sixties psychedelic counterculture and the occult, and Chris Josiffe presents another bit of the story for his Forum this issue (see p56).

One unlikely convert to the underground music scene in the UK was Jack Bracelin, a former disciple of Wicca founder Gerald Gardner and a dedicated naturist who went on to run a lightshow at the famed UFO Club, early home to British band Pink Floyd. Fascinating stuff – and we've winkled out (if you'll pardon the expression) a further direct collision between the worlds of naturism, magic and psychedelic rock. In 1964, Bracelin had taken over the Five Acres naturist resort, once owned by Gardner, following the latter's death (the Bricket Wood coven continued to meet there, paying rent to Bracelin). One result of Jack branching out into the rather different world of the London music scene was what must rank as one of Pink Floyd's oddest dates. According to the Pink Floyd Concert Database (www.neptunepinkfloyd.co.uk/pfcdb/), the band actually played at the Five Acres nudist colony on 5 November 1967 – a bit chilly at that time of year, surely? Not to mention the danger posed by all those fireworks…

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

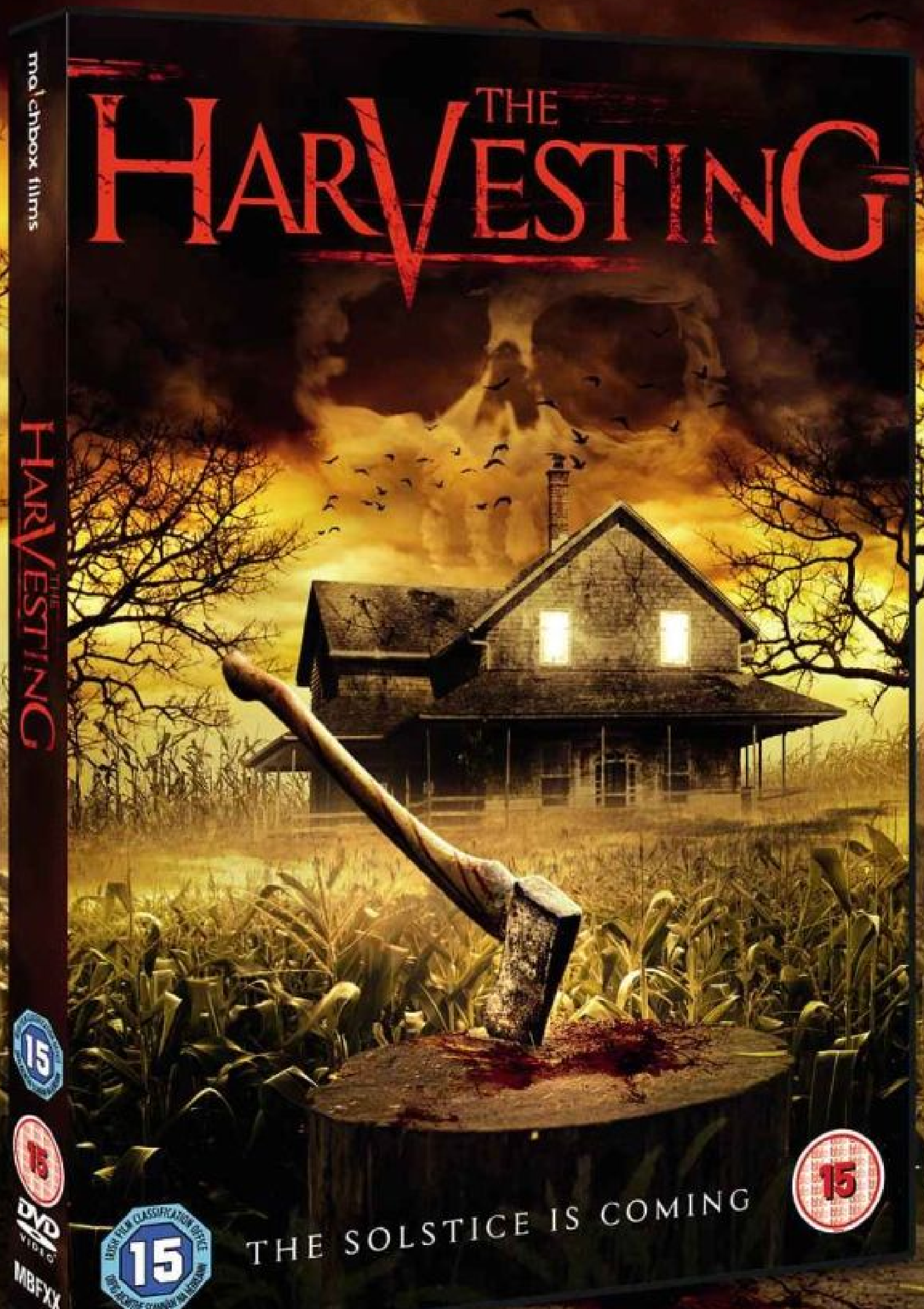
Paul Sieveking
PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 78

THE SOLSTICE IS COMING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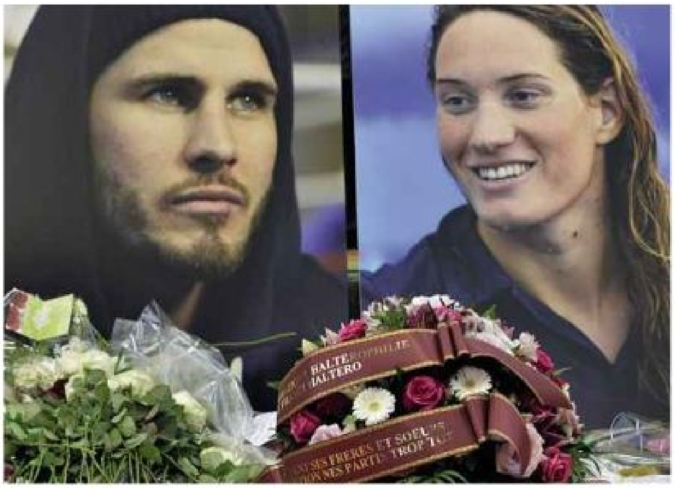
A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

strangedays

Chapter and curse...

The book that refuses to be filmed, plus 2012 Olympic athlete die-off



LOIC VENANCE / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

LA MALEDICTION OLYMPIQUE

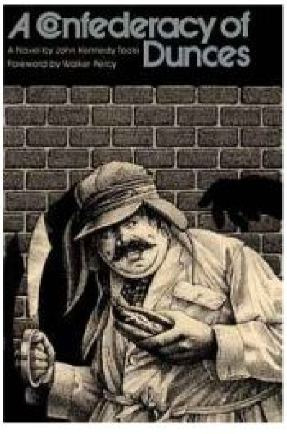
Francophone media have reported that 18 athletes who competed in the 2012 London Olympics have died since the Games. The first mention of "the terrible curse of the London Olympic Games" was made in November 2015, when the French TV channel BFMTV reported the death of the Belarusian sprinter Yuliya Balykina. Balykina, who competed in the 2012 Games in both the 100m and 4x100m relay, was found dead and covered in plastic in a forest outside the Belarusian capital, Minsk. A 28-year-old man was charged with her murder.

"*La malediction olympique*" cropped up again last March, after Australian rower Sarah Tait died from cervical cancer. "Sarah Tait is just the latest in a very long list of top athletes who have died after taking part in the London Olympic Games," wrote Gilles Festor in *Le Figaro* on 5 March 2016. "This Olympic 'curse' has now claimed 18 victims." The curse idea probably took hold in France because of the shocking deaths of two French Olympians – Camille Muffat and Alexis Vastine (pictured above) – in March 2015. They were among 10 people killed when two helicopters collided in Argentina, during the filming of a TV survival show, *Dropped*, where celebrities are dropped in rough terrain and left to find food and shelter.

Eighteen deaths over four years sounds like a lot, but not when you consider that 10,568 people took part in the Games. Based on crude mortality rates, statisticians expect 7.89 people in 1,000 to die over four years, so in a group of 10,568 people one could expect about 333 to die. However, Olympic athletes are young – they have an average age of 26. Taking this into account, we should expect approximately seven deaths a year, or 28 deaths in four years.

Here is the roll call of the Olympic dead:

7 Dec 2012: Keitani Graham, Micronesian wrestler (heart attack). 3 Jan 2013: Burry Stander, South African mountain biker (hit by vehicle while training). 9 May 2013: Andrew Simpson, British sailor (sailing accident). 15 June 2013: Elena Ivashchenko, Russian judoka (suicide). 4 Aug 2013: Billy Ward, Australian boxer (suicide). 16 Aug 2013: Abdelrahman el-Trabily, Egyptian wrestler (shot dead). 19 Oct 2013: Jakkrit Panichpatikum, Thai shooter (shot dead). 6 Nov 2013: Christian Lopez, Guatemalan weightlifter (pneumonia). 29 Dec 2013: Besik Kudukhov, Russian wrestler (car accident). 3 May 2014: Elena Baltacha, British tennis player (liver cancer). 9 Mar 2015: Camille Muffat, French swimmer (helicopter crash). 9 Mar 2015: Alexis Vastine, French boxer (helicopter crash). 27 Mar 2015: Daundre Barnaby, Canadian 400m runner (missing at sea). 25 June 2015: Trevor Moore, American sailor (missing at sea). Oct 2015: Yuliya Balykina, Belarusian sprinter (murdered). 10 Nov 2015: Laurent Vidal, French triathlete (heart attack). 10 Dec 2015: Arnold Peralta, Honduran soccer player (shot dead). 3 Mar 2016: Sarah Tait, Australian rower (cervical cancer). *BBC News, 16 April 2016.*



BAD MOJO

Another category of supposed curse is exemplified by the drawn-out attempts to film John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1963). It was repeatedly rejected by publishers and Toole committed suicide in 1969. His mother, Thelma, doggedly touted the book around and it was eventually published in 1980, winning the Pulitzer prize the following year. The book's protagonist, Ignatius J Reilly, is a great intellectual and even greater glutton who roams New Orleans causing chaos. In his Forword, Walter Percy describes Ignatius as a "slob extraordinary, a mad Oliver Hardy, a fat Don Quixote, a perverse Thomas Aquinas rolled into one."

Hollywood soon took an interest and Scott Kramer at 20th Century Fox made repeated attempts to make a movie version. In 1982 Harold Ramis was to write and direct an adaptation starring John Belushi and Richard Pryor. Belushi died before Ramis had even set pen to paper. The baton passed to John Waters, who cast his muse, Harris 'Divine' Milstead, who died in 1988. Other actors considered for the lead role were John Candy (died 1994) and Chris Farley (died 1997). Hiring obese actors was evidently risky. A version adapted by Steven Soderbergh and Kramer, slated to be directed by David Gordon Green, was scheduled for release in 2005. The film was to star Will Ferrell (in a fat suit) as Ignatius and Lily Tomlin as his mother. A reading of the script took place at the Nantucket Film Festival. This time the actor survived – but New Orleans was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. In 2013 Soderbergh mused: "I think it's cursed. I'm not prone to superstition, but that project has got bad mojo on it." *Geoff Riley, letter to D.Mail, 13 April 2016.*

NO PLACE LIKE FOAM
Mysterious suds and puzzling fluff appear in Japan and Morocco
PAGE 8

GOING BERSERK
Buddhist tyre-slasher, naked violinist and crazed catapulter
PAGE 12

MUMMIES DEAREST
A round-up of recent odd and unexpected embalmings
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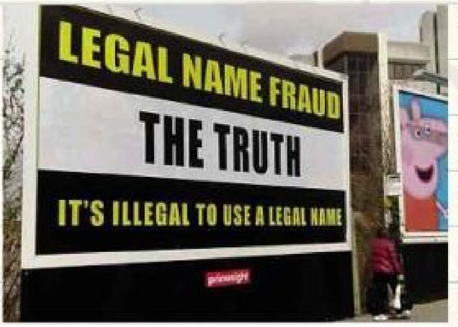
The Conspirasphere

What's in a name? asks NOEL ROONEY as a bizarre billboard campaign spreads across the nation and the mysterious Kate of Gaia exhorts us to take our parts in the fall of Babylon



Some of the weirder iterations of Grand Narrative conspiracy theory constitute what is practically a genre of outsider art. Part of art's function is to take the empirical and imaginary worlds and weave them into a new pattern, to create a new lens through which to see the familiar; it's often a distorting lens (think Egyptian representations of the human form in paintings, the stranger perspectives of Mannerism, Cubist rearrangements of the real) but the ultimate aim of the project is to offer meaning, truth even, that jars with the mundane.

The Legal Name Fraud billboard campaign (if you live in London, or some other UK cities, you may well have seen one by now) fits the definition of art as much as any other genre of communication. It's a wonderfully gnomic advertising campaign for an eccentric slant on the truth of naming, and it has excited a widespread online meme hunt. The specifics of the claim are couched in the terms of an eldritch Mephistophelean jurisprudence: your parents ("They fuck you up, your Mum and Dad") gave you a name, and promptly sold it – and your soul along with it – to the Whore of Babylon by the unwitting use of capital letters.

HTTPS://KATEOFGAIA.WORDPRESS

To find the Grand Narrative in all this, you have to do a little hermeneutical tracking of your own. The trail leads, ultimately, to Kate of Gaia (pictured above, maybe), a rambling and arguably coherent commentator on the state of the world since time and religion began. Kate (whose name is probably Keith; or possibly KEITH, and thus not worth the fiat paper it's capitally written on) has a cryptically Calvinist take on the big story: you've either got or you haven't got soul, and if you haven't, you're either consigned to the collateral damage of damnation, or you're one of the empty consciousnesses that help the real rulers of the world to run the show.

But not for long. Once we all realise the fraud being perpetrated in our names (literally) we will begin to take our part in the fall of Babylon. For someone who explicitly damns religion, Kate/Keith has a profoundly religious worldview, and is pretty keen on the Book of Revelation. S/he is casually dismissive of those of us who refuse to – or simply are unable to – see the truth of the fraud, and tells the converted to leave us behind, like litter strewn on the road to freedom ("Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?").

Freedom means, among other things, forwarding all bills addressed to your fraudulent legal name on to the Crown Corporation; Babylon will have to pay its own bills from now on. Looking at the FAQ sheet prepared by the Kate of Gaia Discussion Group on Facebook (ah, Facebook; talking of distorting lenses) I got a bit confused about the upper case/lower case implications (if the bill is addressed to noel rooney, do I still have to pay it?) but maybe we just need to get with the typography. I was also curious about who (dare I say what shadowy entity) is footing the bill for the billboards. It must have cost a fair amount of Babylon's fiat fiction to run a campaign on this scale, which doesn't entirely fit with the doctrine on offer. Someone signed a cheque, I suppose, but what's in a name?

http://losethename.com/truth-faq-new/
https://kateofgaia.wordpress.com/2014/05/07/babylon-is-fallen/

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

'A girl always remembers the first corpse she shaves'

Irish Times, 11 May 2015.

Don't chase bears with blunt axes if drunk

D.Telegraph, 14 May 2015.

Stag fails to take off

Sun, 11 May 2015.

Nero gives in to badger cull protesters over milk supplies

D.Telegraph, 1 June 2015.

Minister calls for more deaf in the Church

Aberdeen Press and Journal, 21 May 2015.

Dexiu: from medium to mummy

PAUL KOUDOUNARIS tells the extraordinary story of Taiwan's gilded psychic

She was born Huang Tangzhen to a poor family in 1929, but by the time she died in 1993 she was called Dexiu and was a famed Daoist spirit medium. Renowned for making uncannily accurate predictions, she was said to be intensely dedicated to her followers. So dedicated, in fact, that even death did not prevent her from continuing to serve them: with her corpse covered in gold and set into a temple in Jilong, she continues to prophesy as Taiwan's gilded psychic.

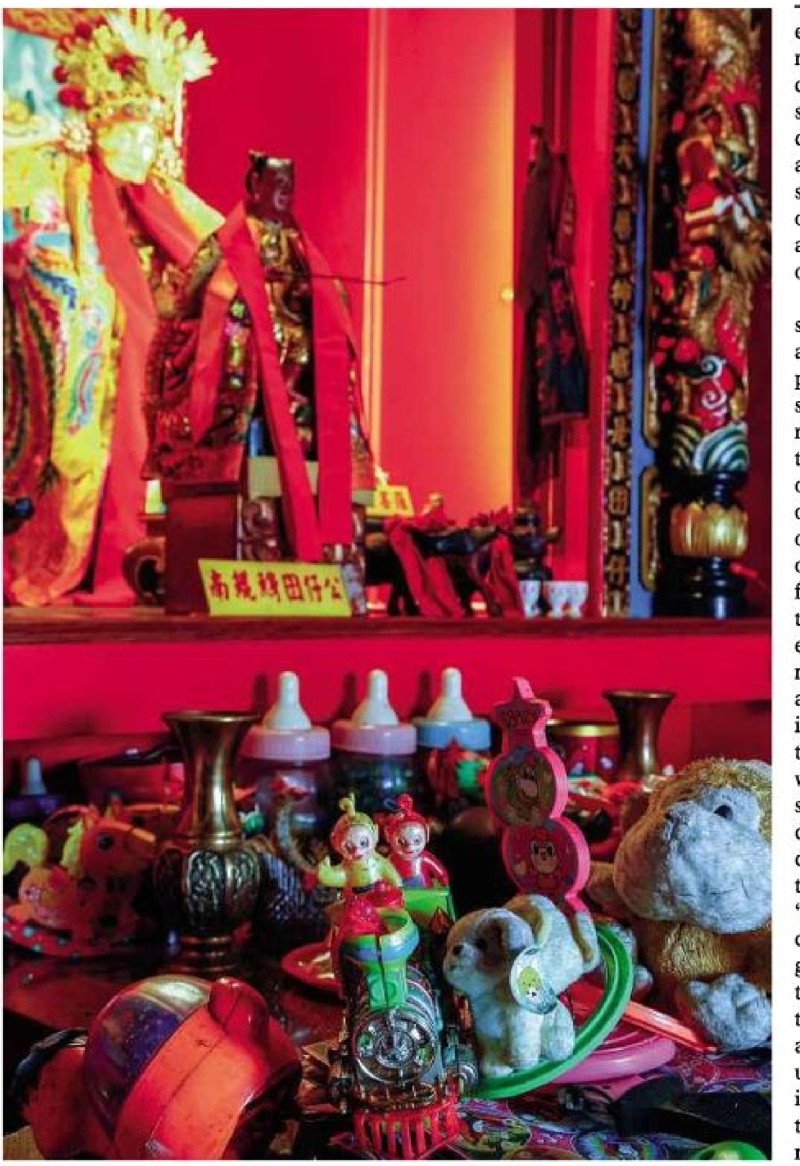
Dexiu rose to prominence due to her ability to channel the god Santaizi, a colourful Taiwanese deity who was born as a fragrant flesh ball, committed *seppuku* as a child, and later became the commander in chief of the celestial army. Santaizi warded off evil and upheld justice; possessed of his spirit, the young Huang Tangzhen would be paraded through the streets, undergoing convulsions and predicting the future. As her powers grew throughout her lifetime, she attracted not only a small army of dedicated followers but the attention of a host of notable supernatural beings. Guanyin appeared to her in 1968 to bestow upon her the name Dexiu, which she used for the rest of her life, and the mythical Jade Emperor came to her in a vision to appoint her to the realm of bodhisattvas, or people of great compassion who work to help all sentient beings attain enlightenment.

As a living bodhisattva, Dexiu did not feel she could simply leave her congregation, even when faced with death. Her last great prophecy was of her own passing, in 1993. Despite being in excellent health, she declared that her end was imminent and left detailed instructions for when it happened: to maintain her presence among the faithful, her body was to be placed in a large barrel, which was to be sealed and left for six years in a stone chamber behind Ci'an Temple, where she was resident. In this way, she explained, her body would be preserved as a natural mummy, and her spirit could continue to work through it.

When the barrel was unsealed in 1999, Dexiu was indeed preserved – wardens of the temple who were present at the opening insist that she showed almost no signs of decay, with even her hair and fingernails being intact. This was taken as confirmation of her divine status, and a local craftsman was brought in to coat the mummy in lacquer and perform the gilding. Welcomed back into Ci'an temple, Dexiu's glittering body was placed upon an altar. The craftsman, less sure than Dexiu's followers of her divinity, insisted on precautions such as creating on the altar a climate-controlled environment behind a sheet of plate glass. And while the temple agreed, to most people who visit, such precautions are unnecessary – the simple truth, as they see it, is that Dexiu is incorruptible, and her gilded state is simply a revelation of her heavenly nature.

The unveiling of the golden mummy was such an event that one of that year's presidential candidates came to help consecrate the altar – and in the process, ask Dexiu for her assistance in gaining votes (he lost the election, although, as Dexiu's adherents explain, through no fault of hers). In truth, the gilding of her body was so successful that it is hard for those not in the know to even realise they are looking at a mummy; at first glance, she simply looks like another golden temple statue. But unlike the statuary, Dexiu is garbed in real clothing – an impressive ensemble of ceremonial robes and headdress – and the ravages of her 64 earthly years left a heavy network of wrinkles and creases on her skin which still show through in some areas, despite the coats of lacquer and gold. All in all, though, she is in a remarkable state of preservation, and her appearance is nothing short of iconic.

Of course, in her current state, Dexiu can no longer articulate her visions and prophecies, so instead she operates by sending messages through dreams to those who pray in front of her. In thanks, they leave offerings, which are piled onto a large table in front of her shrine – anything from cash and jewellery to children's toys. This ensures that at all times the mummy is seated behind a bewildering array of items, from Teletubbies to teddy bears to frying pans, whatever her followers feel she might like as a gift. "We don't really know what to do with all of it," one of the temple wardens explains, "and some of it might be considered junk, but it's given in good faith, and these things belong to her rather than to us, so we just leave it all in place until it becomes unmanageable – after all, it's her due, for continuing to serve." **For more mummy news, turn to p22.**



PHOTOS BY PAUL KOUDOUNARIS

SIDELINES...

MANGO MYSTERY

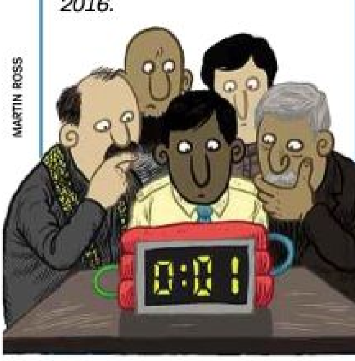
On 7 June, a mango weighing one pound (454g) fell into a backyard in McKenzie Towne, Alberta, narrowly missing Lisa Egan, who was rolling up the cover on the family's pool. She noticed a gaping hole in the plastic cover before spotting the mango floating in the pool, under the cover. As the house is under a flight path for Calgary International Airport, Lisa and husband Duane speculate that the flying fruit came from an aircraft; but how it could fall out of a plane is unknown. *globalnews.ca/news, 9 June 2016.*

PUNCH FORSTALLED

A council in South Wales cancelled a *Punch and Judy* show after deciding it contained "inappropriate" violence. The show, which includes an "abusive" relationship between Mr Punch and his wife Judy, had been planned as part of the Barry Island Beats, Eats and Treats festival in early June. The Punch and Judy Fellowship suggested the ban should extend to Shakespeare and *Tom and Jerry*. *D.Telegraph, 14 May 2016.*

IT WORKS LIKE THIS

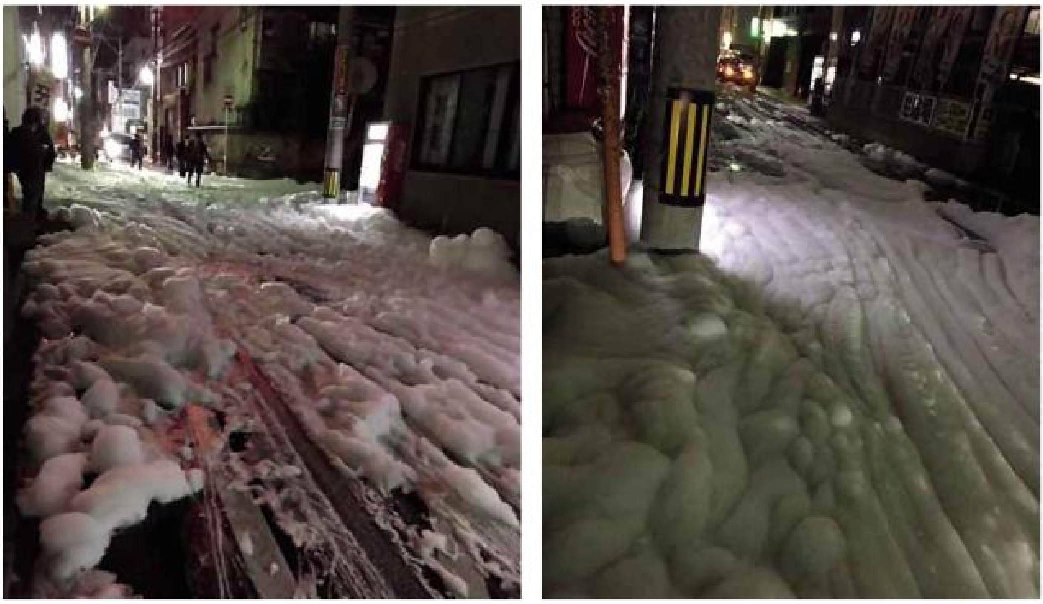
During a hearing in Karachi's Anti-Terrorism Court in Pakistan, a judge asked investigation officer Abid Ali how a locally made explosive device worked. Instead of a verbal explanation, the constable offered a practical demonstration, injuring five, including himself, the judge, and a court clerk. Police and paramilitary forces in the vicinity immediately surrounded the area, fearing a terrorist attack. *dailypakistan.com.pk, 11 April 2016.*



MARTIN ROSS

Foaming in the streets

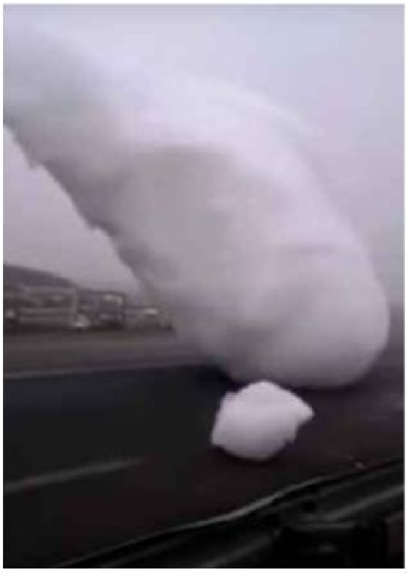
Mysterious suds fall from the sky or pour onto the streets



ABOVE: Residents of Fukuouka tweeted photos of their foam-covered streets. **BELOW:** The Moroccan 'cloud' caught on video.

FOAM FOLLOWS QUAKE

Amidst all the damage and devastation following a 7.3R magnitude earthquake on 16 April in southern Japan was a strange sight: white foam, covering roads and pavements. The foam was spotted in the Tenjin area of Fukuouka city on the northwestern side of Kyushu Island, where the huge quake followed a 6.2R temblor on 14 April. As the foam poured into the streets, social media images and video showed people walking and riding through it, despite the fact that it was knee-high in some places and an unknown substance, possibly toxic. Officials were unable to say what the foam was or where it had came from, but they speculated that the quake might have ruptured an underground pipe, causing the foam to flow up into the streets – though there was no sign of a crack or hole from which it might have emerged. And what sort of utility pipe carries foam anyway? Three days later, there had still been no official explanation. The two quakes killed at least 42 people, leaving hundreds injured and thousands more homeless on Kyushu Island. *telegraph.co.uk, 17 April; weather.com, 19 April 2016.*



CLOUDS OF SUDS

A video appearing to show a thick, foam-like substance strewn across the ground in the region of Doukkala in Morocco was published on YouTube on 3 February. Large cloud-like chunks were filmed rolling on the ground as if pushed by the breeze. The cameraman said that he had never seen a similar substance before. "I have never seen clouds fall down to the ground," he said. "It is strange." Some commenters suggested said that it was a result of chemtrails – a long-running conspiracy theory claiming poisonous toxins are sprayed from planes for sinister purposes. Some believed that real clouds had fallen to Earth, while others suggested it was just river foam carried over by the wind. Answering this last hypothesis, a YouTube user said: "It can't be so. That foam would be too heavy to float around like we see in this video and would be wet and not like cotton."

Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4bb12ZfU1o *moroccoworldnews.com, 10 Feb 2016.*

The Devils of Tarapoto

An outbreak of mass hysteria, or demonic forces at work?

ESMAYOS SÚBITOS CONTINUARON EN EL
OLEGIO ELSA PEREA FLORES

ABOVE AND BELOW: Local news reports with images of fainting and convulsing girls.

In the otherwise unremarkable town of Tarapoto, a commercial hub in northern Peru, more than 80 schoolgirls aged between 11 and 14 have experienced episodes of strong muscular convulsions and fainting while hallucinating. The hysteria-like outbreak at the Elsa Perea Flores School has been occurring daily "since last month". Teachers, local officials and medical workers remain puzzled as to the cause. Doctor Antony Choy told the Peruvian TV channel *Panamericana* "We know it started on 29 April with about 20 children; but we don't understand how this has kept on going on." A notice on the school's web page, dated 3 May, declared the school "suspended because of emergency".

A video accompanying the news release shows barely conscious girls being comforted or carried to calmer places as they scream and writhe. Many were taken to hospitals. Other girls in the classroom are equally delirious. The din and convulsions also frightened staff, helpers, fellow pupils and onlookers. A concerned mother of one of the afflicted was able only to say: "She fainted in school. They didn't say anything at the hospital. She just fainted. She keeps spitting froth from her mouth." An unnamed 13-year-old girl said: "Several children from different classrooms fainted at the same time. I got nauseous and started vomiting. I heard voices."

The most commonly reported symptom was difficulty breathing; many girls were clutching their necks. When asked to describe her hallucination, another anonymous pupil said: "It's as if someone kept on chasing me from behind. It's too disturbing for me to think about. It was a tall man all dressed in black [..] with a big beard [..] it felt like he was trying to strangle me. My friends say I was screaming desperately, but I don't remember much."

"It was a tall man all dressed in black… trying to strangle me"

It may be significant that the phenomenon seems confined to the adolescent girls, while most of the symptoms could suggest a form of mass hysteria, now clinically recognised as 'culturally-based psychogenic illness'. However, some locals have their own ideas. Local parapsychologist Franklin Steiner, helpfully, said there was a burial pit under the school for Mafia or terrorist victims: "It is known that years ago [..] when this school was built, some say bones and dead bodies were found." Others believe it is a case of demonic interference, blaming children who might have been playing with a Ouija board." Some of the media photos focus upon some torn pieces of paper on which were drawn a simple grid and the word "No".

CONTINÚAN LOS DESMAYOS EN
EL COLEGIO ELSA PEREA FLORES

Inevitably, there are reports too of the school authorities summoning "a string of doctors, holy men and even exorcists" since the outbreak began. Neither these, nor special masses by Catholic priests at the school "at the request of parents", have stemmed the outbreak so far. *Metro, D.Express, Sun, D.Mirror, D.Mail, 18 May; news.com.*

SIDELINES...

STATUE BRINGS HOPE

Citizens of Montecristi in Ecuador took heart when a statue of the Virgin Mary in the Basilica de Monserrat was unscathed by the 7.8R earthquake that struck the country on 16 April 2016. The basilica's steeple fell, taking most of the bell tower with it, and a façade gave way, leaving the pews open to the street. "Our Mother of Monserrat" as the 3ft (90cm) statue is called, arrived from Spain in the 16th century. Every November, thousands of pilgrims converge for nine days of festivities in her honour. *NY Times, 22 April; Church Times, 29 April 2016.*

HAUNTED CAR?

A locked car turned itself on and reversed up a drive in Bradford, West Yorkshire, before catching fire. Basharat Ali, 41, found it was his 15-year-old Lexus. Police suspected an insurance scam until Ali produced CCTV footage showing the incident. *Sun on Sunday, 29 May 2016.*

STONED SHEEP

Sheep went on a rampage after eating a pile of dope plants – the remains of an illegal cannabis factory – dumped outside Rhydypandy, a village in South Wales. The sheep roamed the village, breaking into homes. One crapped in a bedroom, one was run over, and others chased ramblers. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 26 May; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 27 May 2016.*

WOOLLY LEXILINK

A flock of sheep escaped from its field and blocked the A35 in Dorset on 5 March – just outside the aptly named village of Wool. *Sunday People, 6 Mar 2016.*

SAVED BY A RING

Employees of removers.org.uk, helping a family who had been evicted, saved the day when they found an £80,000 diamond ring in the garage. James Arony, 38, and his wife Shannon, 36, had debts of £16,000 after falling behind with the mortgage on their £950,000 house in north London. The couple can now keep their home after securing a £60,000 loan. *Sun, 20 May 2016.*

SIDELINES...

STRAP THEFT EPIDEMIC

Police were investigating the theft of hundreds of straps used by standing passengers on the Tokyo Metro system. At least 400 went missing from carriages in and around Tokyo from November 2015 to January 2016. The straps are difficult to remove and are apparently worthless, so it seems to be vandalism for its own sake, which is rare in Japan. Particularly badly hit is the Den-en-Toshi commuter line, which has lost 182 straps, vital for passengers on packed rush hour trains. *BBC News, 1 Feb 2016.*

WAR AND GEESE

Professional goose fights are making a comeback in Moscow 100 years after being banned in Russia. *Sun, 17 Mar 2016.*

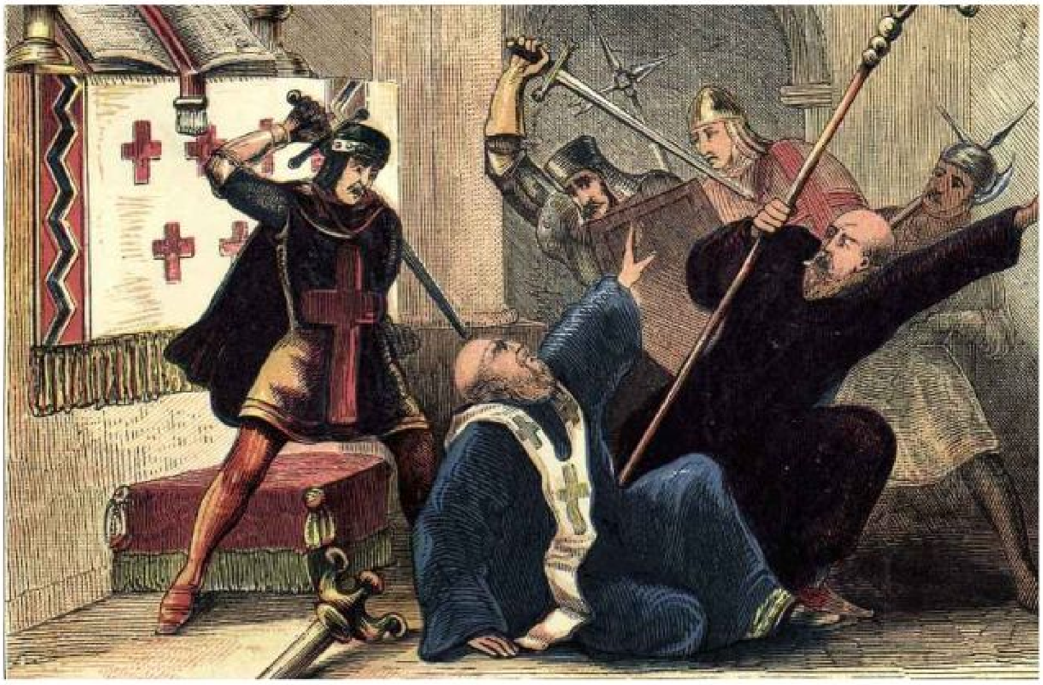
BEES PAY RESPECTS

Following the death of the famous boxer on 6 June, the Muhammad Ali Centre in Louisville, Kentucky, a museum close to Ali's childhood home, was visited by 15,000 bees, which made their home next to a "Float Like a Butterfly, Sting Like a Bee" mural. Beekeeper Kevin McKinney was called in to rehome the insects. The mural is a quotation from Ali: prior to fighting George Foreman in the 1974 Rumble in the Jungle, he told reporters: "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee, his hands can't hit what his eyes can't see." *D.Telegraph, 6 June 2016.*

MARTIN ROSS

RELIC ROUND-UP

BECKET'S ELBOW COMES HOME, WHILE POPE JOHN PAUL II'S BLOOD IS STOLEN



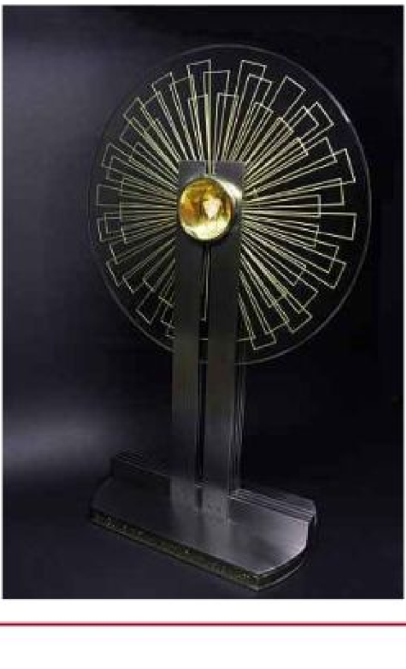
HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The martydom of St Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. **BELOW:** The reliquary containing a fragment of Becket's elbow.

• At the end of May, a gold, jewel-encrusted reliquary containing a fragment of Thomas Becket's elbow arrived in Britain for a week's tour of churches around London and Kent. The relic is usually kept in Esztergom Cathedral, Hungary's main religious centre. Following the destruction of Becket's shrine in 1538, his bones were scattered or lost, but by then the elbow fragment was already in Hungary. One possibility is that it was taken there by Lukács Bánfi, Archbishop of Esztergom at the time Becket was Archbishop of Canterbury (1162-70). Another is that the bone was removed from Becket's body in 1220, when his grave was opened and he was reburied, with scraps of cloth and bone extracted and sent around the continent.

Today, a number of his supposed relics are held by Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, Westminster Cathedral, St Thomas's in Fulham, St Magnus the Martyr in the City of London, and a church dedicated to the saint in Canterbury. Since Henry VIII ordered that Becket's remains be destroyed, the authenticity of these relics is in doubt; nonetheless, they were all brought together for Mass in Westminster Cathedral on 23 May, led by Cardinal Vincent Nichols (head of the Roman Catholic Church in England) and the Hungarian cardinal Péter Erd , and attended by the country's President, János Áder. Subsequent venues included Westminster Abbey, St Margaret's (the official church of the House of Commons), Rochester Cathedral in Kent and finally Canterbury Cathedral, where Becket was hacked to death in front of the high altar by four knights on 29 December 1170. He was canonised two years later and his shrine drew pilgrims from across Europe. Following a Mass on Sunday, 29 May, led by Archbishop Justin Welby, the elbow was flown back to Hungary. *D.Mail, 24 May; Guardian, 28 May 2016.*

Becket was hacked to death by four knights in 1170



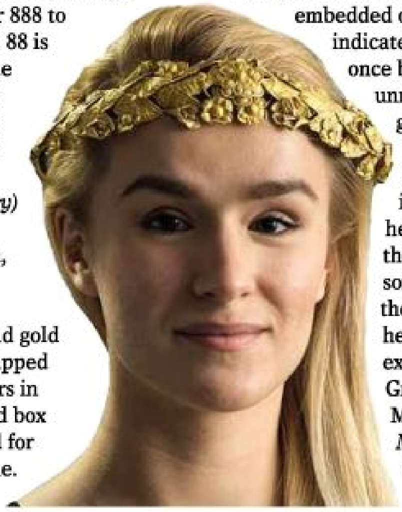
ABOVE: The statue of Pope John Paul II. The detail shows the damage caused by the thieves when they removed the glass container holding the bloody cloth. **BELOW:** The 2,300-year-old gold crown found in a tatty cardboard box under a bed.

- A cloth with a drop of blood from Pope John Paul II has been stolen from Cologne Cathedral. A visitor noticed the relic was missing on Sunday morning, 5 June, and alerted a church official. It had been in a glass container, which had been prised from the base of a statue of the Pope, who visited Cologne Cathedral in 1980 and died in 2005. *Metro, 6 June; Sydney Morning Herald, 7 June 2016.*

- An 1886 Winchester rifle that once belonged to a man who helped capture Apache chief Geronimo sold in late April to an undisclosed buyer for $1.2 million (£877,000). The Rock Island Auction Company of Illinois said it was the most expensive single firearm ever sold at auction. *Irish Independent, 16 May 2016.*

- On 16 June, the press were barred from an auction of Nazi memorabilia in Munich, amid condemnation by Jewish groups and calls for its cancellation by the city Mayor. However, a journalist for *Bild* gained access disguised as a potential buyer and reported that almost the entire collection was bought by an unidentified man who said he was from Argentina. The collection, assembled by American surgeon John K Lattimer, included a military-style jacket worn by Hitler (that fetched €275,000), an X-ray of his skull after the 1944 assassination attempt (€21,000), the Führer's dog licence bill (€3,800), a job lot of Hermann Goering's nightshirts and silk underpants (€3,000), and the cyanide capsule with which Goering committed suicide (€26,000). There were also dresses worn by Eva Braun and manuscripts by Heinrich Himmler. In total, the auction made around €900,000. The mysterious buyer used the number 888 to identify himself; 88 is the neo-Nazi code standing for HH or Heil Hitler, H being the eighth letter of the alphabet. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 10 June; D.Telegraph, 21 June 2016.*

- A 2,300-year-old gold crown found wrapped in old newspapers in a tatty cardboard box under a bed sold for £14,000 on 9 June. Initial press reports predicted it would make "at least £100,000", based on a 2012 auction price of almost £200,000 for a similar crown. The delicate Greek myrtle wreath – 7.5in (19cm) across and weighing 3.5oz (100g) – was uncovered in a cottage in Taunton, Somerset, where the elderly owner had kept it hidden for years, unaware of its value. He asked auctioneers from Duke's of Dorchester in Dorset to look at some items he had inherited from his grandfather and expert Guy Schwinge was astonished when he saw the ancient artefact. Bits of earth embedded on the wreath indicate it was once buried. The unnamed seller's grandfather was a great collector and it is likely he acquired the wreath sometime in the 1940s when he travelled extensively in Greece and the Middle East. *Metro, 27 May; D.Telegraph, 12 June 2016.*



BNPS

SIDELINES...

CHOMPING DOWN UNDER

Three vampire-like biting attacks took place on New Zealand's North Island early this year. On 30 January a woman bit a man's neck so hard her teeth sliced through an artery; the victim lost so much blood he was hospitalised. The next day, a woman was arrested after chomping on another woman's ear. In an earlier incident, a third person was bitten during a family argument. *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 2 Feb 2016.*

MARINE RECORD

Varvara, a nine-year-old grey whale, has made the longest migration ever recorded in a mammal – from Russia to Mexico and back again. The 14,000-mile (22,530km) journey was completed over five months without food or sleep. Satellite tracking of the 35ft (10.6m), 30-ton Varvara ('Barbara' in Russian) showed she crossed the world's largest ocean at a rate of 90 miles (145km) a day. *D.Mail, 16 April 2015.*

GOAT-FARTS DOWN PLANE

A Boeing 747-400 freighter plane, taking 2,186 goats from Australia to Malaysia, made an emergency landing in Bali when the fire alarm was activated, but there was no trace of fire or smoke. The alarm had been set off by the goats' methane and droppings. *D.Mirror, 5 Nov 2015.*

UNKNOWN COMPANIONS

Earth may be playing host to nearly one trillion species of organisms, but only one-thousandth of one per cent of those organisms is so far identified, which means that 99.99 per cent of all life forms are yet to be discovered. A great number are single-celled organisms such as bacteria and archaea. The estimate published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, was made at Indiana University using dataset technology. *Nature World News, 3 May 2016.*

AERIAL ARSONISTS

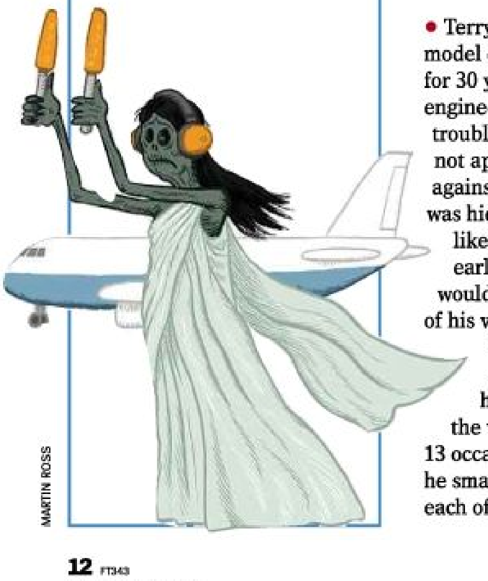
At least two species of raptors – the black kite and the brown falcon – have been observed picking up smouldering twigs from bush fires in Australia and carrying them to unburnt parts to reset the blaze and flush out prey. The birds appear to be a 'third force' capable of starting bush fires, along with man and lightning strikes. There are numerous reports of birds carrying burning sticks at least 150ft (46m) without the fire going out or singeing them. *Times, 9 Feb; D.Mail, 10 Feb 2016.*

LEAPING TOGETHER

Peter Keogh, 76, his son Eric, 52, and Eric's daughter Bethany, 20, were all born on a Leap Day – a coincidence said to be at odds of 3.11 billion to one. *Metro, 29 Feb 2016.*

HAUNTED AIRPORT

When a pilot saw a woman in a white sari on the runway at Bangalore International Airport, he asked airport staff to help her; but when they got there she had vanished. Staff claim to have seen the woman in other parts of the airport – the cargo building, near one of the escalators and in the parking bay. Many are too afraid to work the night shift; some claimed to have seen a headless ghost. Using infrared rays, "experts detected the presence of some negative energy" [sic]. *travel.india.com, 13 June 2016.*



MARTIN ROSS

Men behaving madly

Berserk Buddhist, crazed catapultist and violent violinist

LEFT: Julian Glew caught on CCTV. **LEFT:** Violinist Stefan Arzberger.

• A Buddhist monk went on a tyre-slashing rampage because he was upset after he accidentally squashed an insect. Julian Grew, 45, vented his frustration last September by slashing 190 tyres on 162 cars in Pocklington, East Yorkshire, with a Stanley knife and a needle, causing £20,000 of damage. Glew, who used to live in a Buddhist monastery, has camped in woods for nearly a decade. He was disillusioned by modern society; the tipping point came during a bus journey when he watched people talking into their mobile phones rather than to each other. Things came to a head when he stepped on the insect. He was arrested after being caught on CCTV. He told police he was angry and upset because Buddhists are banned from killing living creatures, but he wanted to avoid "hurting people". In January he was jailed for 11 weeks at Beverly Magistrates' Court. *Sun, 21 Jan; telegraph.co.uk, Metro, D.Express, 22 Jan; East Riding Mail, 27 Jan 2016.*

• Terry Jones, 61, appeared a model citizen. He had worked for 30 years as a refrigeration engineer, had never been in trouble with the law and did not appear to hold grudges against anyone. However, he was hiding a dark secret: he liked to use a catapult on his early morning commute. He would wind down the window of his van, load up with ball bearings, then fire at a glass-fronted building on his regular route, wind up the window and drive on. On 13 occasions over five months, he smashed a pane of glass, each of which cost £20,000 to repair. He is not known to have objected to the architecture of 3 Sheldon Square in Paddington, west London, which is home to a hotel, fitness club and offices, including the headquarters of Prudential UK. Jones didn't know anyone working there. He had never been turned down for a job there. "I fired at it because it was there," he told Southwark Crown Court. "This is about as bizarre and inexplicable a case as I've ever had to listen to," said Judge Andrew Goymer. Jones, of Croydon, who was arrested in March 2015 after police found him via his number plate. He was given a 12-month sentence suspended for a year, ordered to pay £2,000 compensation (is that all?) and complete 240 hours of unpaid work. *Times, Eve. Standard, 14 Jan 2016.*

A tall, wild-eyed and naked man stumbled out of his hotel room

• Around 7.30am on 26 March 2015, a tall, wild-eyed and naked man stumbled out of his room at the Hudson Hotel on the edge of Central Park in Manhattan, and began knocking on the doors of guests, claiming to be room service. When Ms Robinson, a 64-year-old tourist from North Carolina, opened her door, he began throttling her and bashing her head into the walls and shelves of the hotel room closet. The attack ended when a security guard intervened. The naked man was Stefan Arzberger, 42, lead violinist with the renowned Leipzig Quartet. His explanation was that a transsexual prostitute whom he had taken to his room had slipped him a date rape drug and then robbed him. He claimed to have no memory of what followed. CCTV footage showed him going up to his room with the hooker at 3.52am, and the latter coming down in the elevator with his iPad at 4.37am. Arzberger was thrown in jail without a drug test being carried out. With a court case and civil suit hanging over him, the unfortunate man, widely considered one of the best violinists in Germany, resigned from the Leipzig String Quartet on 7 December. Obliged to sell his cherished 18th century Lavazza violin to pay legal bills, he remains in limbo, forbidden to leave the US or to seek work. *Sunday Telegraph, 14 June 2015; strafjournal.com, 7 April; berliner-kurier.de, 15 May 2016.*

DISCOVER

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Emily Krak
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MATT PATTINSON

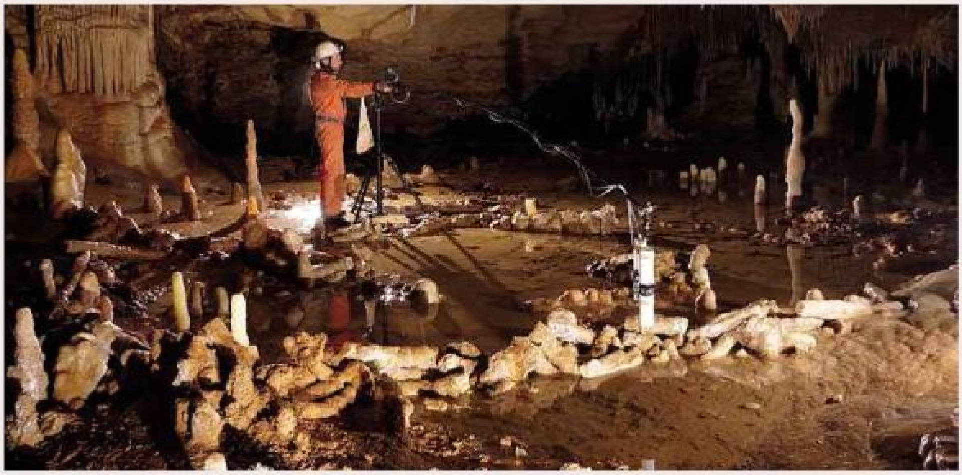
ARCHÆOLOGY

Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind – The Journal of Archæology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.tandfonline.com/rtam)

OLD, VERY OLD – AND WEIRD

Deep within the Bruniquel Cave near Toulouse in south-west France is a strange, even eerie, arrangement of stalagmites, some left standing, around 400 others, weighing around two tons, chopped to similar lengths and laid out in circular patterns up to 16in (40cm) high, one of which is 23ft (7m) across. In the late 1990s, archæologist Francois Rouzaud used carbon-dating to estimate the age of a chamber in the cave, and the result turned out to be c.47,000 years old. This would have made the cave 'sculpture' a little older than the earliest known cave art, and likely meant that Neanderthals as opposed to *Homo sapiens* created it, indicating an unsuspected level of Neanderthal sophistication; but at such remote antiquity carbon-dating is at its limits of accuracy.

The matter rested until 2013, when Sophie Verheyden, a stalagmite specialist from the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, decided to have another look at the enigmatic feature. She assembled an expert team that drilled into the stalagmites and dated them based on mineral accumulation on the sections where they were broken. They came up with a date that was so jaw-droppingly ancient the procedure had to be repeated. But there it was, their research indicated that the cave sculpture was c.176,500 years old – undoubtedly Neanderthal. The builders must have had a "project" to go so deep into a cave – down winding tunnels 1,102ft (336m) from the entrance – where there was no natural light. The simplest explanation is that the structures served as a shelter or refuge, perhaps roofed with wood or skin – but no debris suggesting domestic activity has been found, beyond one charred bone fragment that possibly belonged to a bear or large herbivore. So perhaps Bruniquel served some mysterious ritual role, providing further evidence for the Neanderthals' capacity for symbolic thought. The structure itself remains totally enigmatic, even a little haunting. *Nature, via BBC News, 25 May; Daily Kos, 26 May; newscientist.com, D.Telegraph, 27 May 2016.*



ETIENNE FABRE / SSAC

ABOVE: An astonishing circle of stalagmites created by Neanderthals deep within the Bruniquel Cave.

WHAT LIES BENEATH

We report on a major discovery around the Angkor Wat ancient temple city complex in Cambodia, where archæologists have uncovered subsurface evidence of previously undocumented mediæval cities. In two aerial surveys, in 2012 and 2015, a system called LIDAR ("Light Detection and Ranging") was used, involving laser-scanning equipment attached to low-flying helicopters. This system can be filtered to peer through foliage and other vegetation and undulations in the ground, to reveal subsurface features. It is said to have been the most extensive airborne study ever undertaken by an archæological project, covering 734 sq miles (1,900km^2). The surveys have revealed a complex urban landscape including canals, a network of highways and mysterious linear and spiroid features, which may be related to previously unseen types of water management systems. But perhaps most mysterious of all are what the archæologists are calling 'dome fields' – large areas of unexplained grid-like arrangements of mounds.

These new discoveries confirm what was already suspected – a city beneath Phnom (Mount) Kulen. The team leader, Australian archæologist Dr Damian Evans, stated: "We have entire cities discovered beneath the forest that no one knew were there… this time we got the whole deal and it's big, the size of Phnom Penh big." The complexes seem to have been the remnants of the hub of the Khmer empire, claimed to have been the largest pre-industrial urban centre on Earth during the 12th century AD. *Guardian, 11 June; Live Science, 14 June 2016. (Original paper in* Journal of Archaeological Science *[online] 13 June 2016.)*

THREE-QUARTERS AS OLD AS TIME?

The Petra complex in Jordan may contain that "rose-red city half as old as time" (as well as a setting for Indiana Jones movie scenes), but now they've discovered something as old or even older hidden in the sands beneath it. And it's huge – a platform measuring 56x49m (184x161ft), as long as an Olympic swimming pool and twice as wide. Using satellite and drone photography along with ground surveys, the discovery was made by Sarah Parcak, a self-styled 'space archæologist' from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The platform also has a smaller platform within its perimeter; this once had columns on one side with a vast staircase on the other – which oddly doesn't face the city centre. The researchers are as yet unable to figure out the nature of the structure. It is so large that they feel someone at some time must have noticed subtle surface signs of the feature, but if so, such observation was never documented. *Guardian (online), 9 June; BBC News, 10 June; 2016. (Original paper published in the* Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research *No. 375, May 2016, pp.35-51.)*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

201: ...BUT WORDS WILL NEVER HURT ME

"Hates and Malices – murderous radiations from human minds" – Fort, *Books*, p1015

William B Irvine's *A Slap in the Face: Why Insults Hurt – and Why They Shouldn't* (Oxford University Press, 2013) is a worthy complement to Nancy McPhee's two Penguin collections (1980 & 1983) of worldwide objurgations.

Its notice in **FT304:63** singles out the Turkish boys' competitions of rhyming insults and the Eskimos of the central Arctic with their ritualised exchanges of sung insults – 'Eskimo', incidentally, is now 'politically incorrect' in that part of the world, replaced by 'Inuit'.

As Valentina Pagliai shows at length in her 'The Art of Duelling with Words: Toward a New Understanding of Verbal Duels across the World' (*Oral Tradition* 24/1, 2009, pp61-8), this is an international practice, with examples given from (e.g.) many African countries, Bolivia, Fiji, Sardinia, plus the stand-up exchanges popular with beer-fuelled American college students – Your Start-Up for Ten... Also (I gather) a staple of something called Monkey Island Games.

Of course, this column has to add Fort's "thrice-accursed Greeks" and Romans, who classified the style as Amoebaean Song, a hotted-up offshoot of Stichomythia or verse-by-verse dialogue alternations in Greek tragic drama. A rough modern equivalent is the Gershwins' 'Let's Call The Whole Thing Off,' immortalised by Louis Armstrong.

The earliest Greek examples occur in the *Idylls* of Theocritus (c. 308-240 BC, from Sicily), especially nos. 4 & 5. It's a fair bet that these polished literary poems are drawn from real life; compare nowadays the improvised banter of rival fans at football matches.

These poems are too long to quote in full – plenty of available translations, including Anthony Holden's 1974 Penguin plus several online. Number 5, 'The Goatherd versus the Shepherd,' between Comatas (C) and Lacon (L) are the rougher. Some extracts:

C: Beware that shepherd over there, the Sybarite, my goats;
It's Lacon. He pinched my fleece-coat yesterday.
L: Get out of that stream! Out, my goats! Can't you see
It's Comatas. He nicked my pipe last week.

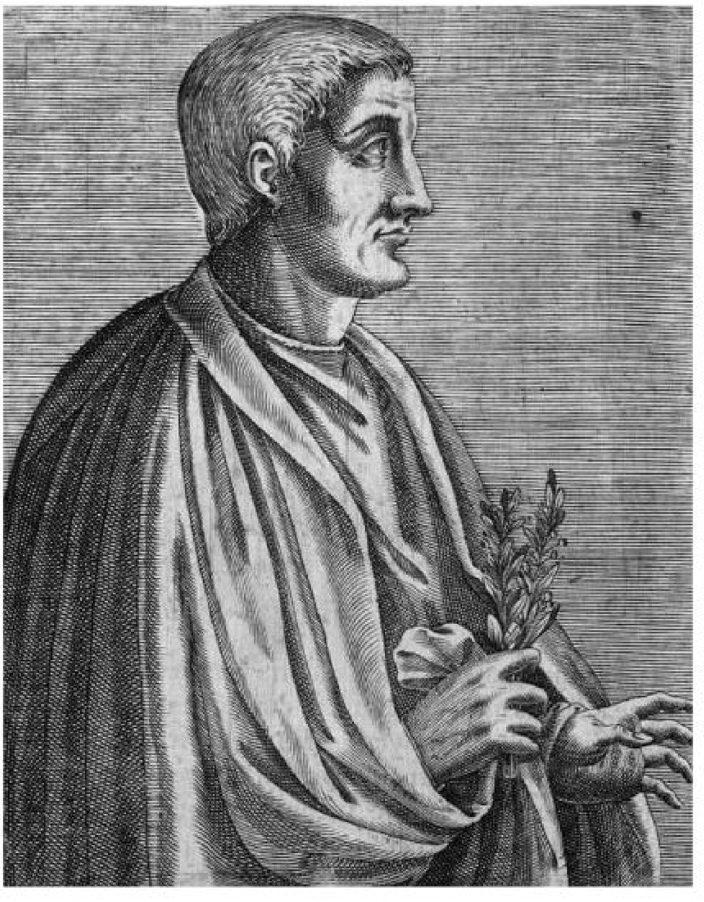
After 40-odd more exchanges in this vein, the tempo zooms up thus:

C: When I bugger you, you'll feel it. Your she-goats
Will bleat, and your rams will screw them.
L: May you be buried no more deep than you bugger,
You old hump-back. You just come here now,
And you'll sing in your last country match.

After this, the two settle down to a more decorous (compare loosely the 'cutting contests' between pairs of jazz players) song battle, with a third party awarding the prize to Comatas, who signs off by threatening to cut the balls off one of Lacon's randy-looking rams.

Virgil hit off an Italian equivalent in his third *Eclogue*, a verbal duel (as did Theocritus, in hexameter verse, the traditional medium for didactic, epic, and satirical poetry). Again, space only for extracts (oodles of print and online translations; Guy Lee's 1984 Penguin handily includes the Latin text):

Menalcas: Poor sheep! That flock's always unlucky. While himself
Fondles Neara, dreading that she favours me,
This hired keeper drains the ewes dry twice an hour,
Robbing the flock of all their sap, the lambs of milk.
Damœtas: Watch what you say, before accusing me of that.
We know what you did, while the he-goats looked and leered,
And in a shrine too, though the easy Wood-Nymphs laughed.



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

(Either buggery or bestiality is implied. Whatever the precise carnal activity, we schoolboys were never told, our school edition being here bowdlerised. Vladimir Nabokov, 'On a Book entitled *Lolita*,' p318, laughed about "English schoolboys who after a night of homosexual romps have to endure the paradox of reading the Classics in expurgated form" – *experto credite!*)

As in Theocritus, a politer musical contest ensues. This time, the third party judge tamely declares a tie, inspiring this gorgeous rival verdict from Samuel Johnson (*Adventurer* 92, 1753): "Instead of rejoicing that they are both victorious, I should not have grieved could they have been both defeated."

Horace (pictured below), *Satires* I. 5, describes the journey he actually took in 38/37 BC from Rome to Brundisium (Brindisi) in the company of Virgil and others; it is beautifully re-created by Peter Stothard, *Spartacus Way*, 2010, pp58-63, dubbing it "the world's first piece of recognisably modern travel writing, packed with dirt and discomfort, asides on food and sex" – intimations of Bill Bryson, Rick Steeves, and Paul Theroux.

Verses 50-70 describe how the travellers were diverted at a friend's villa by the comedians Messius and Sarmentus, Roman equivalents (albeit inferior) or Morecambe & Wise or The Two Ronnies:

Sarmentus struck first. "I declare you're the spitting image of a wild horse." "Too right," said Messius, tossing his head to general laughter. "Hey, if you can threaten us like that with your horn cut off, what'd you be like if it were still on?" – the left side of his hairy brow was disfigured by an ugly scar. After many jokes about Messius's face and 'Campanian disease' (we don't know what this was; one ancient commentator suggested warts – BB), he begged him do the Cyclops dance, swearing he'd no need of mask or buskins. Messius hit back, asking if Sarmentus had offered his slave's chain to the household gods, and why had he bothered to run away since a pound of meal would have been grub enough for a runt like him. We had great fun as the party continued into the night.

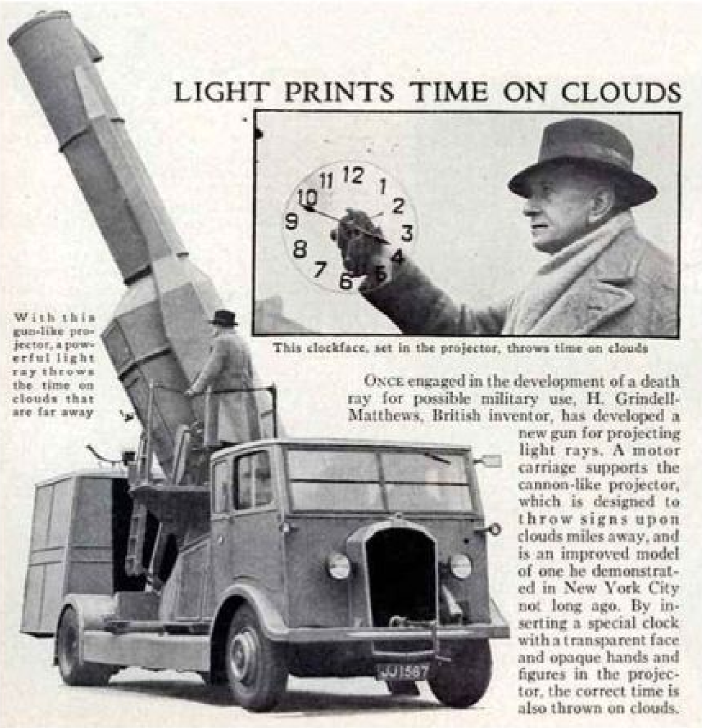
Horace and company were an easy audience. A modern Stand-Up audience would have heckled or pelted them off-stage in minutes.

"Take Care, oh reader, with whom you are amused, unless you enjoy laughing at yourself" – Fort, *Books*, p895

MATT PATTINSON

WRITTEN ON THE CLOUDS

From Death Ray Matthews and his 'Sky Projector' to the Pentagon's 'Prophet Hologram', casting images onto the clouds has yielded mixed results says **DAVID HAMBLING**.



LIGHT PRINTS TIME ON CLOUDS

With this gun-like projector, a powerful light ray throws the time on clouds that are far away

This clockface, set in the projector, throws time on clouds

ONCE engaged in the development of a death ray for possible military use, H. Grindell-Matthews, British inventor, has developed a new gun for projecting light rays. A motor carriage supports the cannon-like projector, which is designed to throw signs upon clouds miles away, and is an improved model of one he demonstrated in New York City not long ago. By inserting a special clock with a transparent face and opaque hands and figures in the projector, the correct time is also thrown on clouds.

Projecting images on to the clouds with a searchlight seems straightforward. Just place a suitable shape over the beam, and you can create the image of a bat above the city and summon Gotham's resident superhero. Real-life cloud projection is trickier, and claims have always outstripped achievements.

The first known instance of an image projected on to clouds was an accident. The 16th century Italian polymath Gerolamo Cardano is known today for his work on algebra and probability theory. He was also notable as a biologist, physicist, astrologer, alchemist [see **FT330:12**], and animal lover. While he was living in Milan a report of the sighting of an angel in broad daylight had him rushing into the street to join a crowd of some 2,000 people to witness the apparition. "The strangeness of the sight filled everyone with amazement," Cardano recorded in his book *On Medicine*.

Then one of the spectators – a lawyer, says Cardano – pointed out that the winged figure in the clouds was merely a projection. The Sun's rays were being reflected from the bronze angel on the spire of the church of San Gottardo on to a backdrop of clouds. The event seems to have been a remarkable one-off, requiring a specific arrangement of low-angle sunlight and thick, low cloud cover. The willingness to see angels may also have played a part.

Even these days, an unfocused circle of light on the clouds can confuse observers. As recently as 2008, a spate of UFO sightings in Essex were traced to advertising searchlight beams, known as 'Skytrackers', from a nightclub in Basildon. "The light did not appear to come from the ground as there was no beam as you would see with a spotlight," one witness who wished to remain anonymous told the local paper.

Darren Fisher, owner of the Sky Bar, said that they had received a number of calls about UFO sightings after using the Skytracker. "We haven't had any complaints about it. It's just a bit of fun. We usually put it on at weekends," said Fisher. "I'm sorry it hasn't turned out to be anything as interesting as a flying saucer."

Skytrackers can attract attention to a location, but they do not tell viewers what is on offer. For well over a century, inventors have been trying to make up for this shortcoming and project legible words. In 1890, the Galveston (Texas) *Daily News* reported that an un-named 'Western Inventor' was trying to interest investors in his cloud-advertising projector for use in cities. The paper noted that if he was successful, "we may expect to see some startling and grotesque effects".

By 1892 two British inventors claimed each to have their own working apparatus for cloud projection. Captain Ronald Scott, nicknamed 'the English Edison', was a pioneer in the field of arc lighting. There were no clouds on the night of the test at the Acton Hill Electric Light and General Engineering Works (his own workshop, adjacent to his house), so the images were projected on to a bank of steam. Even projected to a range of over a half a mile, the words were said to be clearly legible.

Meanwhile, Sydney Hodges of Ealing claimed to have projected "large and highly luminous letters" on to clouds with "an invention of his own devising". The test was carried out in front of a number of distinguished witnesses, including a Colonel of the Royal Engineers. Other scientists agreed that the scheme was perfectly feasible. Electrical lighting was one of the wonders of the age, and "advertising in the clouds" was another logical step. A million-candlepower searchlight was reportedly installed on a New York skyscraper to projects advertisements in the form of words and images.

Not everyone was happy about this new development. One commentator complained about the prospect of having the skies lit up with "a blazing description of somebody's patent trouser-stretcher, or a glowing picture, as large as Bedford Square, of a lady viewing the latest thing in corsets." Reality fell well short of the promise, and none of the schemes came to anything. Perhaps the inventors were shut down by some vast conspiracy that wanted to keep this technology for its own nefarious purposes. Or maybe they did not work as well as hoped.

On Christmas Day 1930, Harry Grindell Matthews, known as "Death Ray Matthews" for his previous unsuccessful project [see **FT174:38-47**], showed off his Sky Projector. It threw the image of an angel, the words 'Happy Christmas', and a clock face on to clouds above Hampstead Heath. Supposedly, the words and clock face were legible, but there do not seem to be independent accounts of this. Matthews gave several other demonstrations but failed to convince investors.

Also in 1930, a Colonel Friedrich Herzenwirth, who claimed to have worked for German Intelligence, gave an interview to a New York newspaper, relayed by the London *Daily News*, in which he alleged that the 1915 'Angel of Mons' had been created by German searchlights mounted on aeroplanes. The effect was supposed to demoralise the English but had backfired (though projecting the Virgin Mary with hand uplifted on clouds near the Russian front had proved more successful). His claims were not taken seriously. The idea clearly had some appeal though; one of the ideas in the Pentagon's 1999 brain-dump "Nonlethal Weapons: Terms and References" was the Prophet Hologram – "The projection of the image of an ancient god over an enemy capital." Again this does not seem to have gone anywhere.

Cloud projection remains an elusive goal. Air France used a laser to write on the clouds over London and project the outline of an aircraft in 2014, but as the agency involved put it: "Laser cloud writing is a little unpredictable." The 2013 Kumo Project in Japan and the 2015 Nimbus Project in Britain (inspired by the Prophet Hologram) both succeeded in projecting recognisable moving images onto clouds. However, the researchers on both projects emphasise the time and effort it took to get one successful run.

Cloud projection requires exactly the right conditions. When it works, it can be spectacular. Most of the time though, if you want Batman you are better off using the Batphone. The Bat Signal might too easily be mistaken for a nightclub advert.

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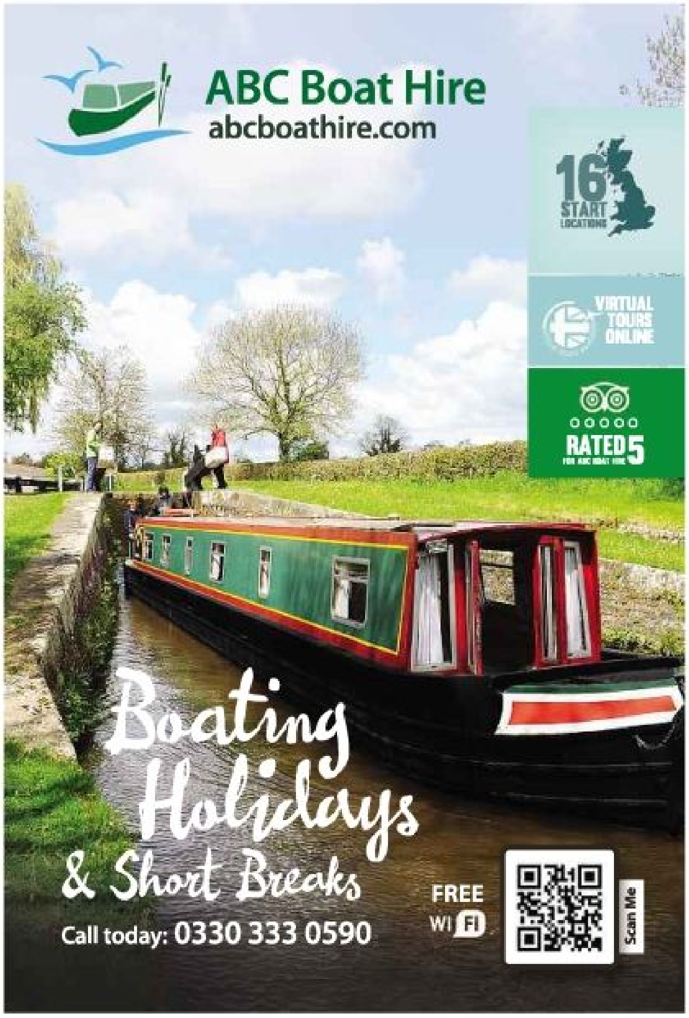
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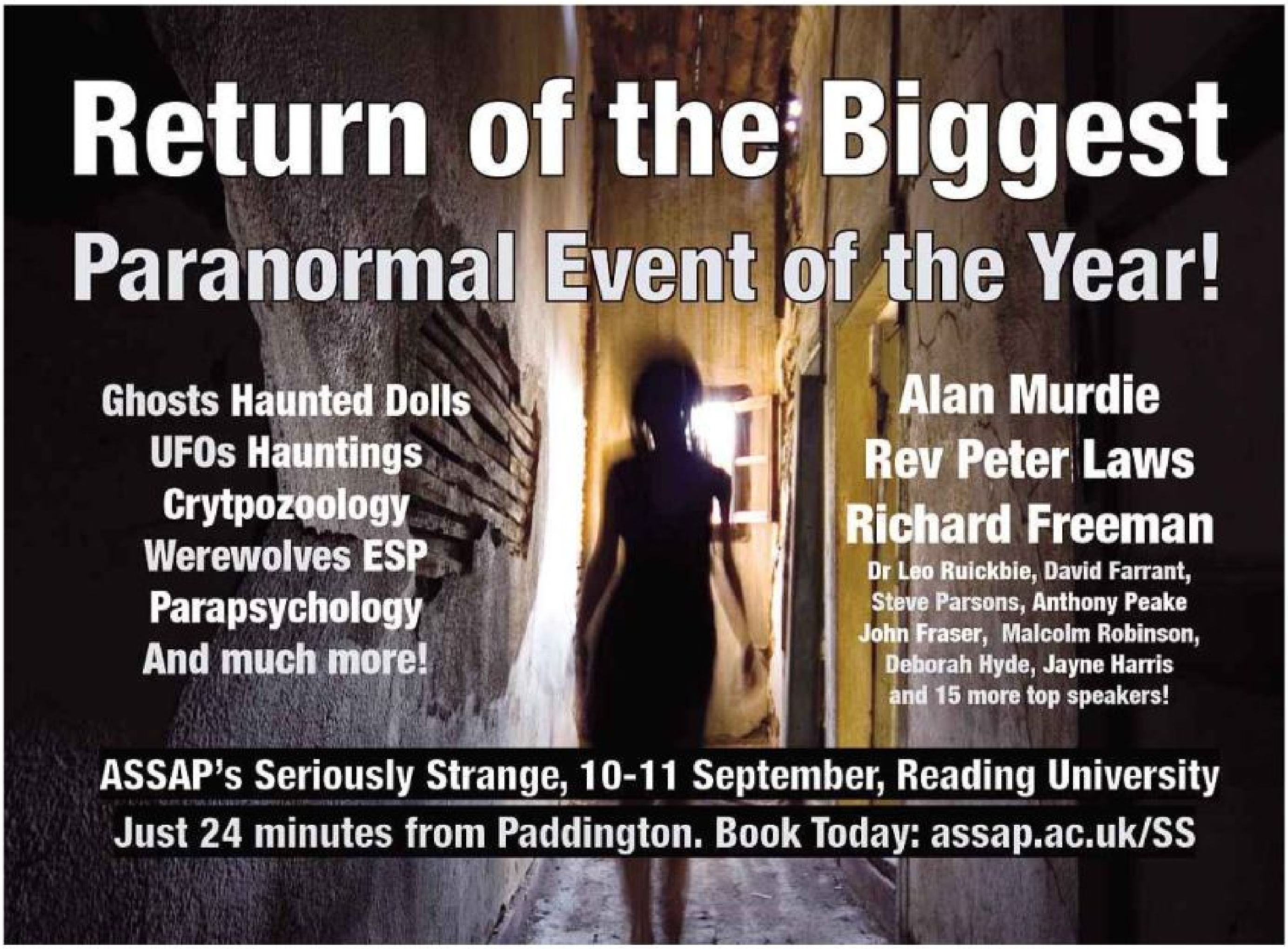
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MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE reports on Glaswegian retail therapy disturbed by a woman in black

ABOVE: Glasgow's Silverburn shopping centre, scene of numerous spooky encounters. **OPPOSITE:** The idea of telepathically produced ghosts was moooted in *Science and the Spook.*

SHOPPING CENTRE SPOOK – A SPIRIT OR SOMETHING ELSE?

An apparition of a woman dressed in black period clothing has been reported four times at an out-of-town shopping centre based at Pollok, Glasgow. Originally opened in October 2007, the Silverburn shopping centre, now boasting an additional cinema and nine restaurants added last year, did not enjoy the slightest reputation for anything ghostly. This all changed in May 2016 with the first of four recorded sightings of "a ghostly figure floating through the building" which reportedly left shoppers shaken and "terrified". One shopper wishing to remain anonymous stated: "We were waiting on our friend coming out of one of the shops, when out of the corner of my eye I saw this dark figure down the corridor, almost hovering – it was terrifying."

It scarcely seems credible that this shadowy Woman in Black could have been some misperception of any real, physical human being, for instance an eccentric elderly lady dressed in old-fashioned attire visiting at some odd hour. Also improbable is any notion that there is a human prankster or a nefarious individual lurking undetected within the Silverburn complex, popping out at odd moments to scare people (it's just too *Scooby Doo*). Management at Silverburn certainly agree there is a mystery to be solved. At the beginning of June 2016 they took the unusual step of calling in Glasgow Paranormal Investigations to look into what had by then become weekly sightings of the figure, with staff also reporting appearances.

Silverburn security guard Thomas Chalmers, who witnessed the apparition, was convinced it was not a physical person. "I had just finished my shift and was leaving the centre bathroom, when I just felt this sudden chill," he said. "I didn't think much of it, but as I looked up I saw this shadowy figure disappear down the hall. There is no way that it was human."

A spokesperson from Silverburn commented: "We are aware that a shadowy woman has been spotted around the centre, and we are taking the sightings extremely seriously. We have reached out to local experts in the field of paranormal activity, who will hopefully be able to shed some light on the matter".

Interestingly, the journalist who broke the story – Chief Reporter for the local *Extra* newspaper John MacInnes – kindly informed me that since publishing these reports, sightings have abruptly ceased. In passing, such a result might be taken as an effective falsification of the psychosocial hypothesis for apparitions, i.e. that people experience hallucinations that correspond with ideas or 'memes' picked up from the media and popular culture. Were the hypothesis correct, one would expect a rise in sightings after the new story appeared, but the reverse has proved the case.

"I SAW THIS DARK FIGURE DOWN THE CORRIDOR... IT WAS TERRIFYING"

Although details are fragmentary, these apparitional sightings have an air of plausibility about them, containing elements familiar in other cases. Seeing – or apparently seeing – a figure from the peripheral vision, 'the corner of the eye', is a feature found in other apparitional sightings as well as a folkloric motif, as those knowing their fairy lore will recognise.

The danger of misinterpreting a visual image in the peripheral vision was one recognised as long ago as 1886 in a discussion on hallucinations in volume one of the classic work *Phantasms of the Living* by pioneer psychical researchers Edmund Gurney, Frederic Myers and Frank Podmore. They considered some – but not all – apparitions attributable to "a slightly abnormal condition of the retina, and that elements of actual sensation from this peripheral source form the basis of the phantasmagoria which the mind elaborates".

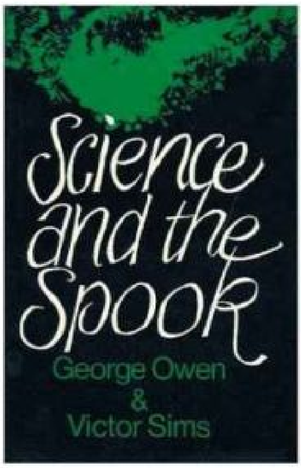
However, those cases involving ghosts seen by more than one witness are hard to explain. Back in 2006, I interviewed a retired policeman who in 1975, together with a fellow officer, had seen what both considered a monk-like figure disappearing into the wall of an ancient abbey. The two officers had been facing each other, with both noticing the gliding figure to their sides, a short distance away, in their peripheral vision.

With the sighting by Mr Chalmers, it is notable it had occurred when he had finished his shift and was potentially quite tired. If so, this would be consistent with the third of apparitional sightings occurring when a person is on the verge of sleep, either half asleep (so-called 'hypnagogic' and 'hypnopompic' imagery). Feeling a chill in the air at the time of a ghost sighting also features in other witness sightings: see, for example, the experience of Andrew Murison, Bursar of Peterhouse College (*Independent*, 19 Dec 1997).

Regarding the Silverburn apparition, a member of Glasgow Paranormal Investigations expressed the opinion that: "It is not uncommon for a spirit to be attached to a site before the present building was constructed. Possibly Silverburn or the construction of the new cinema disturbed it. This can be common in hauntings. The most important thing is to ensure whoever it is finds a peaceful resting place."

Seemingly endorsing beliefs in unquiet spirits, an appeal for further information in the *Extra* has resulted in a communication sent to John MacInnes from a female psychic resident in the United States. The latter states she has received enigmatic messages from her spirit guides about the Silverburn ghost, identifying it as "the murdered mistress – yet she was not truly murdered...".

Further to this contradictory statement (it is typical, she claims, for her guides to express themselves in this confusing or cryptic fashion) the apparition at Silverburn is supposedly "a young woman whose husband was actually murdered in their home... on this site and it looks like someplace stately... the man was caught in some bad financial dealings with some Lords and Ladies and that he was hung in his own home as a warning and punishment. His wife or 'mistress' as they referred to her – because they did not know that he had secretly married her – took on the dark garb on mourning him." The psychic concludes: "Eventually, she too took her own life, hanging herself from the same rafter."



It must be said that bringing a psychic or medium into a case of haunting can often lead to wanton claims of multiple spirits haunting premises. However, these cannot be treated as providing any meaningful verification or corroboration unless further independent confirmation is obtained, for example from historic records or other evidence. Potentially, such events as described could have happened at any time from the mediæval period through to the end of the 18th century, or even later if a conspiracy or secret crime occurred. Unfortunately, as will be obvious, the information proffered is extremely vague, with the alleged communicators failing to provide any names of the parties concerned and nothing in the way of dates, nor even the era in which these events supposedly happened. It should always be remembered that the unconscious mind has extraordinary abilities to create characters, landscapes and symbols, as anyone who recalls their dreams will know. More fundamentally, attributing these sightings to a spirit may be jumping the gun, presuming a paranormal element in these experiences. As an alternative, at least two other psychic theories can be proposed which do not involve earthbound spirits.

The first is that this apparition is a place memory, originating with an event on the site before the centre was constructed. According to this hypothesis, a ghost is a kind of recording from the past that sensitive people can perceive. According to this view, any ghost once haunting a former house that stood there, perhaps in the 19th century, could well continue to 'inhabit' the site for several decades, despite constructional alterations, demolitions and developments. When the original building goes, the ghost does not necessarily go with it, but merely continues haunting the same location, to the chagrin of the occupiers of the new property.

At Silverburn, the previous structure immediately existing on the site was another shopping centre, but researching the previous history of the area might yield potentially significant information. This is easier said than done. If there has been constant rebuilding on a specific site, compiling a complete historical record of each occupation could entail lengthy and perhaps unrewarding research, since one could never be sure which information or detail was relevant. Each particular period of occupation and use might provide possible origins for a haunting. Obviously, until some research is conducted it is impossible to say.

Another alternative – rarely considered by ghost hunters these days – is telepathy. As biologist and parapsychologist George Owen wrote in *Science and The Spook* (1971): "The assumption of an actual astral body present in the vicinity of the percipient is, however, somewhat gratuitous and unnecessary if we are prepared to accept an explanation in terms of telepathy" – to which fellow biologist and psi writer Lyall Watson declared "Hear, hear!" (in *Supernature*, 1973, though later revising his opinion in *The Romeo Error*, 1976). The telepathic aspect of apparitions was also extensively discussed in the 60 years following the foundation of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882.

The authors of *Phantasms of the Living* made the case for a telepathic element in many apparitions of people undergoing some kind of crisis (typically death, accident or physical trauma). The recognised apparitions of these stricken individuals would be seen quite unexpectedly at locations far away by close relatives or friends. Such apparitions appeared only once, with the time of death or trauma being found to coincide closely with the moment the figure is seen or perceived.

Less dramatically, late Victorian researchers considered telepathy operated to present "sudden excitations of peripheral stimuli, sight, hearing, and the like" as well as "vaguer organic impressions, such as hunger, which gradually become perceptible from within". (See Frederic Myers, 'Automatic Writing' *Proc. of the SPR*, 1885, vol III 1-63). In the 21st century, crisis cases seem much rarer (perhaps because there is no organised or sustained effort to collect them) although they do still occur: I experienced one myself in January 2011 (see *SPR Journal* vol 78(1), Jan 2014).

One researcher who presented a telepathic theory encompassing both crisis and haunting apparitions was GNM Tyrrell, in a lecture appropriately delivered on 31 October 1942 at a meeting of the SPR (later published as *Apparitions*, 1942,1952). Tyrrell argued apparitions were mental projections and constructions within the mind of the witness or percipient arising from telepathic input from another person, past or present.

Tyrrell proposed a two-stage process suggesting that paranormal cognition begins by the telepathic contact between two personalities on unconscious level with the results having to be 'signalled' to consciousness. It is not a cut-and-dried 'message', but a relatively general idea or 'theme', perhaps best understood as some kind of biologically based signal.

In the second stage, the signal is enhanced by the unconscious mind, mid-way between the deeper level and waking consciousness. The unconscious dramatises the signal, sometimes in highly symbolic form (for example, a drowning person is seen dripping with water) and transmits it to the recipient as a "telepathic idea pattern".

To explain how apparitions follow the laws of perspective when perceived, obeying physical laws, casting shadows or disappearing behind obstacles, Tyrrell proposed they are not present in actual three-dimensional space, but are images moulded by the mind of the percipient. The immediate environment – in the current case a shopping centre – suggests to the percipient how the image should be dramatised. The apparition is duly worked out in detail by the unconscious imaginative powers of the recipient.

That human minds might be capable of this is less surprising if we consider our powers to create characters, landscapes and situations which appear fully realised when dreaming or in waking consciousness, to an extent, to make images in our own 'mind's eye'.

Of course, such a complex theory is highly speculative, especially where the boundaries of telepathy cannot be pin-pointed. Indeed, if some form of telepathy from the living is entertained as an explanation, it poses a whole host of potential difficulties for tracing the origins of an apparition in a busy location like a shopping centre. Given telepathy can operate over a considerable distance, how could one ever identify the individual generator of the telepathic image (or signal)? Could it be some living person obsessively thinking of going shopping (perhaps a frustrated housebound individual), a former employee seriously ill in hospital thinking of their past workplace, or a cash-strapped person imagining going shopping? Yet another possibility might be a recently bereaved shopper thinking of a deceased relative. Even if a fuller description of the apparition becomes available, trying to link it with one specific person is likely to prove an utter impossibility, given the sheer number of people visiting or connected with the location. Thus, the question posed by the headline 'Mystery of haunting at Silverburn – who is the ghostly apparition?' is never likely to be answered, presuming telepathy to be the answer.

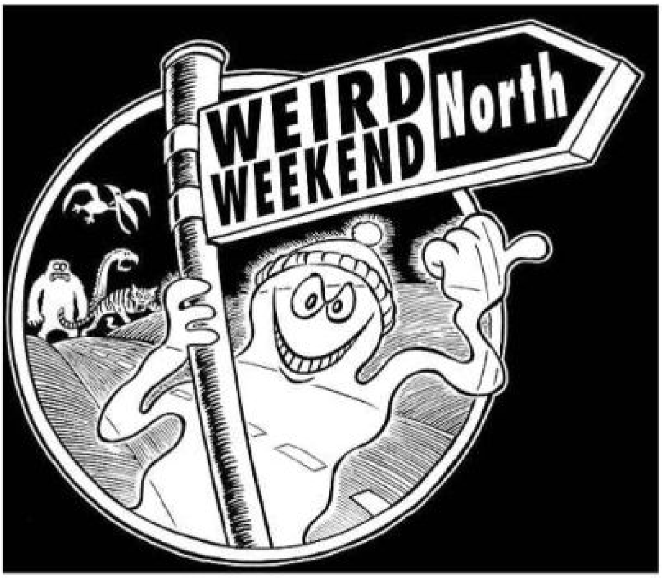
Sources: *The Extra*, 8 June 2016; John MacInnes, pers. comm., 21 June 2016; www.glasgowsouthandeastwoodextra.co.uk/news/local-headlines/mystery-of-haunting-at-silverburn-who-is-the-ghostly-apparition-1-4148145#ixzz4CDK6aCl1

SPECIAL REPORT

IT'S WEIRD UP NORTH!

ROB GANDY reports from Cheshire on Weird Weekend North 2016

The weekend of 2-3 April saw the inaugural Weird Weekend North take place in the Community Hall at Rixton-with-Glazebrook, near Warrington in Cheshire, organised by local author, painter and cryptozoologist Glen Vaudrey. Inspired by Jon Downes's annual Weird Weekend[1] in Devon, Glen decided to stage a Northern equivalent easily accessible to anyone living north of Birmingham. The local community centre was a pragmatic venue choice for Glen and his friends and family helpers, but everyone found it pleasant and spacious. The sunny weather, varied programme, and close proximity to the Black Swan pub, made for an enjoyable and thought-provoking experience.



HUNT EMERSON

SATURDAY 2 APRIL

It is guaranteed that no event will go according to plan, and Glen was grateful for cryptozoologist Richard Freeman stepping into the breach when the first scheduled speaker dropped out at the last minute. Richard gave an eloquent and comprehensive talk about the history of dragons, noting their antiquity and variations in attitudes towards them around the world. He finished his talk by focusing on the Shoney, a sea serpent haunting the north east coast of England. It's said that Vikings in their longboats would draw lots and sacrifice a crewmember to prevent the Shoney attacking their boat. Apparently, there were allegations as recently as 1928 that a related cult made human sacrifices to the creature, and there have even been recent sightings of the beast.

Steve Jones followed, with stories about hooded entities. These included the experience of two men who camped at the hard-to-find Black Stone circle on Ilkley Moor in Yorkshire. While relaxing late one evening they separately saw small (3ft/90cm tall) brown shapes circling the few remaining stones. They quickly decided to leave. Another man visiting the site saw a 7ft (2m) brown, hooded figure that seemed aware of him; petrified, he left his gear behind and ran to the nearest road, over a mile away. Strangely, all reported hooded entities were one or other of these two sizes, with nothing in between; and they have often been seen together. Steve claims to have seen one walk through a wall. They don't seem terribly interested in humans, but if you should encounter one with red eyes then Steve's advice is: "Get the hell out of there!"

One sad story was about a dog that foretold deaths

Caron Charlton and Kathryn Chadwick [2] discussed evidence for wildmen in the UK, but were reticent about specifying locations for fear of attracting unwelcome attention. This included indications of a "nest", subsequently vacated, with a new one built elsewhere. Photos showed bent trees and what could have been a creature peering through branches, but equally could be a simulacrum. Some woodlands where sightings have occurred appeared too small to sustain populations of wildmen, but the pair conjectured that perhaps they were feasible if there were no serious competitors for prey. Lively debate ensued.

FT regular and Ghost Club chairman Alan Murdie gave a polished presentation about poltergeists and their interpretation and history, touching on several major cases, including Enfield and Battersea. As a practising lawyer, he considered there was too much well-documented evidence about the phenomenon for sceptics to reasonably dismiss; something was happening, but how to interpret it? For example, analyses of acoustic signatures of poltergeist raps showed patterns completely different to those for humans.

Lee Walker is a regular on Radio Merseyside, where he talks about urban legends, with a particular focus on Liverpool itself. In his inimitable fashion he related several strange stories about the city. One told of an old chap he had met and a dog that foretold deaths. It was a spooky tearjerker of a tale that left sections of the audience, and Lee himself, literally weeping.

Andy Lloyd took everyone into the evening, describing the hunt for Planet X, referring to Zecharia Sitchin's '12th Planet Theory' and the mythical planet Nibiru. Andy argued for some very large astronomical body beyond Pluto, within the outer Solar System – perhaps a brown dwarf? (No, not one of the aforementioned hooded entities!) It was an excellent presentation with lots of great graphics.[3]

Glen Vaudrey closed with a talk about fairy sightings, covering many classic cases. Just as Richard Freeman had been scathing about Disney's depiction of dragons, Glen was critical of the way their films represented the little people.

SUNDAY 3 APRIL

Hunt Emerson opened the second day with an illustrated talk about his Phenomenomix strip, as seen in the pages of *FT*. He shared examples of his early contributions and covers, and showed how they evolved into his current highly recognisable style. Choice selections from stories of historical occult characters raised lots of laughs – although Hunt did complain about having to draw Aleister Crowley so often!

I was next up, presenting examples of phantom hitchhikers (I was pleased that Hunt had made one the central character of his WWN 2016 logo design – shown above). I described these in my article "The Old Man Of Halsall Moss" **[FT328:32-39]**, highlighting the double-witness "White Van Man" case, and then presented the audience with a brand new case that had come to light after I shared the article with a university colleague. By coincidence, her mother-in-law knew someone who'd had a similar experience. She had worked in the TSB bank in Ainsdale during the late 1970s when a management work colleague described what had happened to him driving home to Wigan. During his car journey he believed he had run someone over, and got out to look for the victim. He couldn't find anything, but was so convinced that he had hit someone that he reported the incident to the police – a fact that his workmates at the bank had found most amusing. This illustrates why people who have strange experiences are sometimes reluctant to volunteer their stories. I was delighted that several people approached me afterwards with their own tales.

Richard Freeman delivered his scheduled session about the Tasmanian Wolf, describing its history and evidence from recent cryptozoological expeditions. Certain parts of Tasmania are densely forested and far from human habitation, and the creature could have survived with a comparatively small population. Plenty of first-hand testimony is suggestive of its continued existence, but nothing in the way of hard evidence has emerged – although Richard feels the authorities know more than they are letting on.

Laurence Armstrong described the local Warburton Souling Play,[4] a Cheshire tradition performed in early November, closely related to the more common Mumming Play. In a nutshell, it's about death and revival. Distinctively, a Horse character is included, normally a decorated horse's skull (and not to be confused with the Hobby Horse of other English traditions). Other characters (historically all played by men) include: Enterer, King George, Turkish Champion, Old Woman, The Doctor, Beelzebub, and Driver. Plays are performed in local pubs, with songs requesting ale and asking people to "put your hand in your pocket and pull out your purse", with money collected for charity.

Finally, Mick Walters presented "The Dodleston Messages". He outlined and analysed the story of a Cheshire house where the occupants found messages left on their home computer, with some scrawled directly on to paper. These purported to come from an individual who had lived on the same site in the 16th century, and ongoing correspondence ensued, mixed with messages from seemingly mischievous teenagers from the future. There were many questions and comments, particularly from IT buffs. It was a suitably "weird" conclusion to the weekend.

There was an array of other activity to complement the talks. "Big Steve" and "Little Steve" kitted customers out with WWN 2016 T-shirts;[5] Hunt Emerson was busy drawing caricatures and selling comic books;[6] Andy Lloyd and Lee Walker were promoting their new books;[7] and I was selling copies of *Looking Forward To Your Funeral*,[8] a not-too-serious guide intended to help people help their family and friends give them the send-off that they want – even if they don't think they deserve it.

During the intervals we heard the weird ambient music of Gianluigi Gasparetti (aka Oöphoi; see **FT216:57**). Often drawing on fortean themes, it was played in part as a tribute to Gigi, who unfortunately died in 2013 after a long illness.

The event was a great success, with nearly 70 people attending on Saturday and 55 on Sunday. Glen was delighted to announce that WWN 2017 will take place at the same venue on the weekend of 1-2 April 2017. You would be a fool to miss it! Updates on WWN 2017 will be available on Glen's Facebook page http://glenvaudrey.wix.com/weird-weekend-north, where tickets will be on sale.

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8 www.lftyf.com/

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

103: ALPHA MALES

ILLUSTRATIONS: HUNT EMERSON

The myth

Wild wolf packs are led by an Alpha Male and an Alpha Female, who earn and maintain their position at the top of the hierarchy by fighting, threatening and generally dominating their fellows.

The "truth"

There are no Alphas, wolf experts now say – and, indeed, have been saying for some years. The Alpha concept was popularised in the 1970s, following the publication of *The Wolf: Ecology and Behavior of an Endangered Species* by L David Mech. Mech himself has since repudiated his findings, but the book is still in print, despite, as the author puts it, his "numerous pleas to the publisher to stop publishing it". The flaw in the now-debunked theory is a familiar one in animal studies: the wolves studied were captive, or "non-natural". Far more fieldwork has been done in recent decades, which shows that the typical, natural wolf pack is composed of a breeding pair and their youngest offspring. In other words, the "leaders" of the pack are simply parents looking after their young – not Alphas who have triumphed in a competitive environment. Indeed, that is the proper term today for what used to be called Alphas: the Male Parent and the Female Parent. The idea (still popular in some dog-training circles) that your pet dog looks to you as its "pack leader", and should be trained accordingly, was based on the Alpha wolf theory, and therefore is considered similarly outdated.

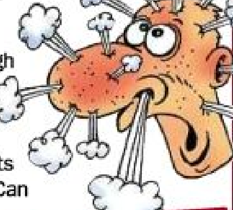
Sources

www.davemech.org/news.html; https://positively.com/dog-training/myths-truths/pack-theory-debunked/; http://www.wolf.org/wolf-info/basic-wolf-info/wolf-faqs/

Disclaimer

Apologies to Alpha Bosses who've just had their management strategies destroyed. But if you can prove us wrong, don't sit howling in the dark – write in.

Mythchaser

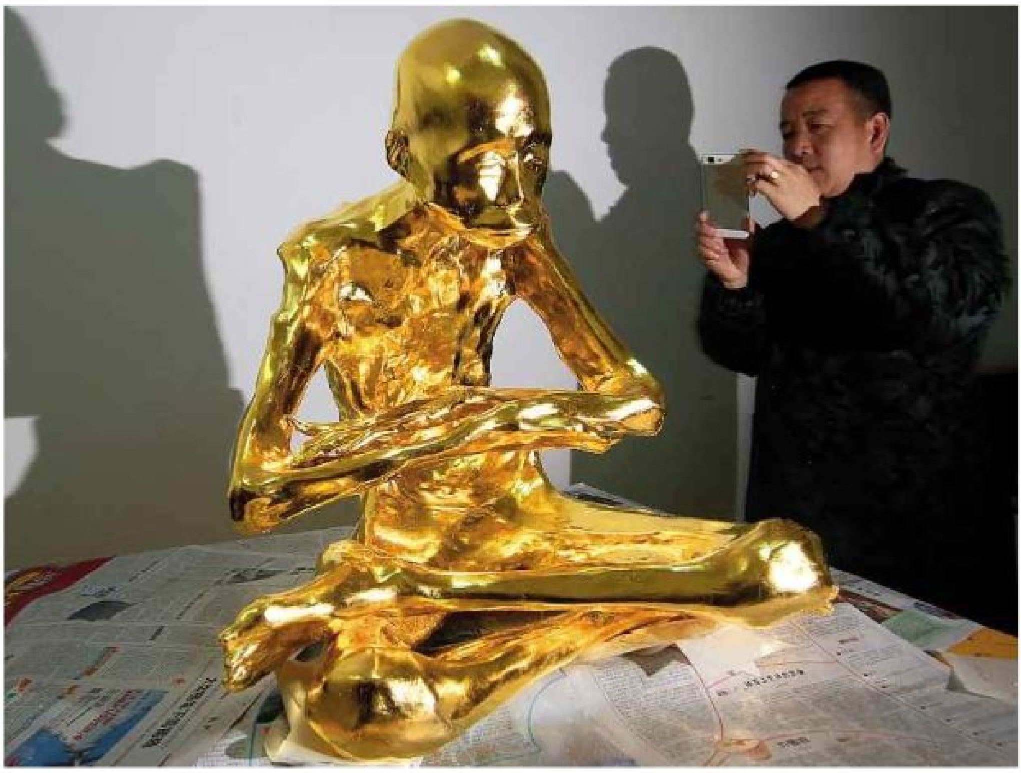


We all know that humans do not "breathe through their skin", but only through their mouths and noses; that this old myth is kept alive by hucksters selling beauty products. But a reader has heard that "recent research" suggests this might not be as clear-cut as once thought. Can anyone clear the air?

DON'T MISS MYTHCONCEPTIONS THE BOOK
OUT NOW ONLINE AND IN ALL GOOD BOOKSHOPS

MUMMY NEWS

New discoveries push back date for ancient Egyptian embalmings, while dead German adventurer undergoes instant mummification at sea



AP / PRESS ASSOCIATION IMAGES

LEFT: The body of Buddhist monk Fu Hou has been treated by mummification experts and covered in gauze, lacquer and gold leaf. **BELOW:** The mummified remains of Manfred Fritz Bajorat, found on his yacht off the Philippines earlier this year.

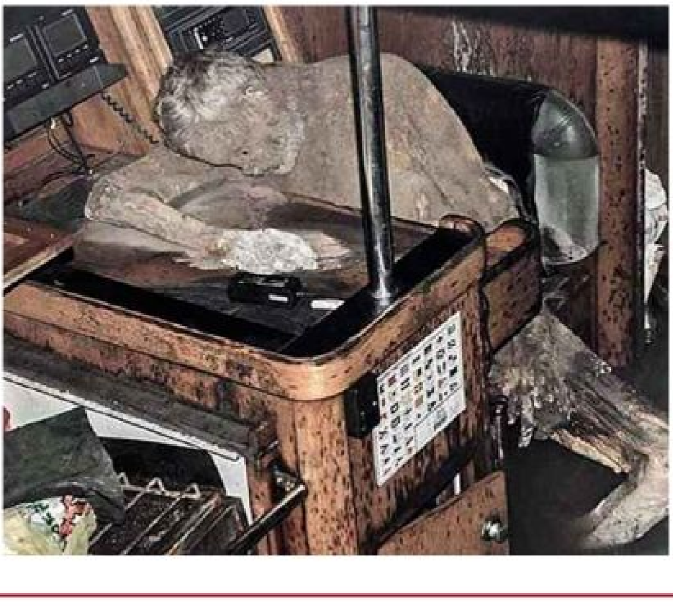
GOLDEN OLDIE

The body of a revered Buddhist monk has been mummified and covered in gold leaf. Fu Hou died in 2012 aged 94 after spending his adult life at the Chongfu Temple in Quanzhou city, south-eastern China. His body was treated by two mummification experts and sealed in a large pottery jar in a sitting position. When the jar was opened three years later and the body showed little deterioration, it was washed in alcohol and covered in gauze, lacquer, and finally gold leaf. It will now go on display in an ancestral hall of shrines as an object of worship. In the 1990s, an ancient statue of the Buddha was found to contain the mummified body of an 11th or 12th century monk **[FT321:12]**. For another example of a gilded mummy, see pp6-7. *[AP] 29 April; D.Telegraph, 30 April 2016.*

MUMMIFIED MARINER

The mummified body of a German adventurer – Manfred Fritz Bajorat, 59 – was found on his abandoned yacht off the coast of southern Philippines on 25 February. Christopher Rivas, 23, a resident of the coastal town of Barobo, was fishing with a friend nearly 40 miles (64km) from the coast when he spotted the 40ft (12m) yacht *Sayo* with a broken sail and alerted the authorities. The late Herr Bajorat, identified from paperwork on board, was sitting at a desk near the radio telephone in the hot cabin, slumped over on his right arm as if he were asleep. His posture indicated that death was unexpected, perhaps from a heart attack. Authorities ruled out foul play.

Fu Hou's body was sealed in a pottery jar for three years



BARABO POLICE STATION

Bajorat had apparently had no physical contact with anyone for seven years, although a friend told *Bild* that he heard from him on his birthday a year ago via Facebook. Bajorat was born in the Ruhr. According to German media reports, he hated the hard winters of his homeland and took to the seas to find warmer climes. He had crisscrossed the world's oceans in 20 years at sea, clocking up over half a million nautical miles. He sailed the Atlantic, the Pacific, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, the Aegean and, as a younger man, the waters of the Baltic bordering northern Germany.

Inside the cabin, much of which was underwater, were found photo albums apparently showing his wife, family and friends, and clothes and tins of food were strewn all around. In 2008 he broke up with his wife Claudia, who had accompanied him on his travels. She died of cancer in Martinique in May 2010. In 2009 in Mallorca he met another world sailor called Dieter who told Germany's *Bild* newspaper: "He was a very experienced sailor. I don't believe he would have sailed into a storm. I believe the mast broke after Manfred was already dead." It is believed he had a daughter called Nina who works as the captain of a freight vessel. Initially, it was thought he had been dead for months, dry ocean winds, hot temperatures and the salty air helping preserve his body, which appeared mummified – but an autopsy indicated he had died from a heart attack only about a week before discovery. *dailymail.co.uk, 29 Feb; mirror.co.uk, 2 Mar; Sun, 1 Mar; Times, 2 Mar 2016.*

EARLY EGYPTIAN MUMMIFICATION

A form of mummification was being carried out in Egypt more than 6,000 years ago, 1,500 years earlier than previously thought. Embalming substances contained in funerary textiles from the earliest known Egyptian cemeteries – such as Mostagedda in central Egypt – showed mummy-making from about 4300 BC. Biochemical analysis identified the components from funerary textiles retrieved from the cemeteries during excavations in the 1920s and 1930s and held in Bolton Museum, Greater Manchester. The embalming agents – a plant oil or animal fat base, with smaller amounts of pine resin, an aromatic plant extract, a plant gum and petroleum – were infused into the linen used to wrap the corpse to provide an antibacterial and protective barrier, and were essentially the same embalming 'recipe' used much later at the pinnacle of ancient Egyptian civilisation.

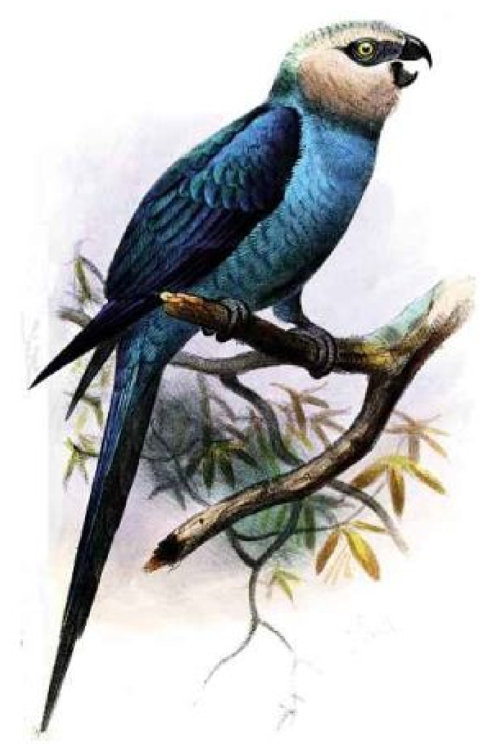
"I was surprised that the prehistoric Egyptians, who lived in a tribal society 1,000 years before the invention of writing, were already in possession of the empirical science that would later become true mummification," said one of the researchers, Jana Jones, an Egyptologist at Macquarie University in Australia. *[R] 13 Aug 2014.*

AND FINALLY...

The mummified body of an unnamed man in his 70s, wrapped in bandages from head to toe, was found under a desk in a house in Dawlish, Devon. "There was some talk of a sex game that had gone wrong," said a neighbour, although a police spokesman would only say that foul play had been ruled out. *Sun on Sunday, 24 April 2016.*

AZ ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden



OUT OF THE BLUE IN BRAZIL

Spix's macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii* is one of the smallest macaw species and also one of the rarest. Once native to Brazil, it is currently represented only by captive specimens, as it has been deemed extinct in the wild for at least 15 years. Consequently, the ornithological world was both stunned and delighted when news emerged that in mid-June 2016 a specimen of this grey-headed, blue-bodied parrot had been not only witnessed by local people but also filmed on video by one of them, at Curaçá, in the Brazilian state of Bahia, the last-known stronghold of the species in the wild. It can be seen flying through some trees, giving voice to its characteristic cry. Pedro Develey, Director of Brazil's Society for the Conservation of Birds, believes it may have been released from captivity by a poacher attempting to avoid arrest, rather than being a genuinely wild specimen, but the indisputable fact is that there is presently at least one confirmed Spix's macaw in the wild. However, the ever-present threat posed by poachers means that there is no guarantee it will remain here.
http://www.birdlife.org/americas/news/spix%E2%80%99s-macaw-reappears-brazil 24 June 2016.

A SEA MONSTER'S ROCKY END

On 29 April 2016, a YouTube member with the user name Wowforreeel uploaded a short video and photograph (right) of a very large 'something' at the centre of a sea disturbance near Antarctica, which had first been seen by Scott C Waring via Google Earth on 9 April, at the co-ordinates 63°2'56.73"S 60°57'32.38"W. Wowforreeel had also viewed it via Google Earth and suggested that it might be a rock formation, but also likened it to a plesiosaur's fin. After the video went viral in mid-June, other claims made online included an underwater UFO, and (a very popular identity) the tail fin of a truly ginormous giant squid, claimed on one website to be 60-120m (200-400ft) long – a veritable kraken, in fact. However, following an investigation of this maritime mystery by deepsea biologist/conservationist Andrew David Thaler (among others), in contrast to the subject of a certain John Wyndham sci-fi novel, it proved not to have been the kraken rising but merely a large rock – as suspected by Wowforreeel.

One of the South Shetland Islands of Antarctica is Deception Island – which was very close indeed to the coordinates of the mystery object, and also was aptly named, in view of how deceiving one of its minor neighbours had been. For as Thaler revealed on 17 June, after homing in on the object's coordinates using a nautical chart, he had discovered that arising up above the ocean surface at this exact point, just southwest of Deception Island, was a tall rocky outcrop, known as Sail Rock due to its sail-like shape. This provided an exact morphological match with the mystery object seen in the video. There was no plesiosaur, no gargantuan squid, merely a far-from-monstrous, well-mapped tower of rock – and one, moreover, which had previously been measured incorrectly in the 'monster' image, because Sail Rock stands only 30m (100ft) high.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsijTye9LRA 29 April; www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3643828/Has-KRAKEN-spotted-Google-Earth-Giant-squid-like-create-120m-long.html 16 June; www.southernfriedscience.com/did-monster-hunters-find-a-120-meter-long-giant-squid-on-google-maps/ 17 June 2016.

A VENETIAN VISITOR

In June 2016, a brief snippet of video taken on a tourist's mobile phone soon went viral, as it showed a most unexpected visitor to Venice. The few seconds of film clearly reveal what looks very like a common stingray *Dasyatis pastinaca* swimming just below the surface of the Grand Canal, with dark form and greatly expanded, laterally oriented pectoral fins. Even the local gondoliers were startled, confessing that in all their years on the Venetian canals they had never seen anything like it. Hardly surprising, because this is typically a marine species, whose closest natural domain is the Mediterranean. However, it does have a tolerance for low salinity, and often occurs in estuaries, so it may have made its way into Venice from the Mediterranean via the Adriatic; or it may even be a related Red Sea species that has passed through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean and thence northwards to Venice.
www.express.co.uk/news/weird/682653/creature-gondolas-venice-Grand-Canal 23 June 2016.

NECROLOG

This month, we say goodbye to British Columbia's 'Mr Sasquatch', salute a royal relic of the British Raj and see a money-spinning astologer set off for the spirit world

JOHN GREEN

This Canadian journalist, known affectionately as "Mr Sasquatch", was one of the major chroniclers of North American manimals (hairy hominids). Before the advent of the Internet he had a database of more than 3,000 sighting and track reports. In *Sasquatch Odyssey: The Hunt for Bigfoot* (1999, directed by Peter von Puttkamer), Green was profiled as one of the "Four Horsemen of Sasquatchery," along with Grover Krantz, René Dahinden and Peter Byrne.

In the late 1940s Green graduated from Columbia University with an MA in journalism, and after working for the [Toronto] *Globe and Mail and* the *Victoria Times Colonist*, he purchased the *Agassiz-Harrison Advance* in 1954. In 1956 Swiss-born René Dahinden asked him about two-legged upright creatures, like the Abominable Snowmen, reported in British Columbia. The following year, he began his research, interviewing witnesses and conducting on-site inquiries. He was the first to interview Albert Ostman in depth about his alleged Sasquatch abduction in 1924. He also extended the modern history of Sasquatch sightings back to the Chapman family's 1941 encounter near Ruby Creek in British Columbia, made more credible by footprints seen independently. Then there were the famous footprints found by construction workers on a logging road near Bluff Creek, California, in 1958. Bulldozer operator Jerry Crew took a plaster cast of one track to a local newspaper as "proof", and the moniker "Bigfoot" was born. Green and his wife June immediately drove south to investigate. The tracks had been back ploughed up, but they looked around anyway. June opened their car door and found a footprint a few feet away. What particularly impressed John Green was the similarity between the outline of these Bluff Creek tracks and the tracings he had of one of the Ruby Creek footprints. He was the last surviving investigator of that celebrated first American Bigfoot case.

Green was later hired by Texas millionaire Tom Slick to track Sasquatch in British Columbia, and suggested to Roger Patterson he might wish to look for Bigfoot in the Bluff Creek area. When Patterson and Bob Gimlin encountered and filmed what was claimed to be Bigfoot there on 20 October 1967, Green arranged a screening for scientists at the University of British Columbia. His first book, *On the Track of the Sasquatch*, was published in 1968 and subsequently sold nearly 250,000 copies. This was followed by *Year of the Sasquatch* (1970), *The Sasquatch File* (1973), and *Sasquatch, the Apes Among Us* (1978). In 2005 his research was gathered together in *The Best of Sasquatch Bigfoot*.

Green was elected mayor of Harrison Hot Springs, British Columbia, in 1963, and got funding to have hundreds of thousands of tons of sand from the lake bottom cover the large boulders found along the shore, transforming the area into one of southern British Columbia's most popular tourist locales. He was the founder of the World Sand Sculpture Championships.

John Willison Green, journalist and Sasquatch researcher, born Harrison Hot Springs, British Columbia 12 Feb 1927; died Chilliwack, British Columbia 28 May 2016, aged 89.

Thanks to Loren Coleman's cryptozoonews.com for data

JONATHAN CAINER

Cainer was reputedly the highest-paid writer in British journalism. His father worked for Barclays Bank and his mother was a medical secretary before becoming a spiritual healer. He moved from Surrey to Leeds with his mother when his parents split up. After leaving school aged 15 with no qualifications, he became a petrol pump attendant, joined the free festival movement, played bass guitar with various bands, was briefly married to a girl called Marion, and tried but failed to make it as an alfalfa sprout entrepreneur. He first made his mark in the British press in August 1975, aged 17, when the *Daily Express* nominated him as one of the country's 10 most dangerous anarchists. He described himself as an "unreconstructed hippy", former "dole scrounger" and vegan, with a penchant for the colour purple. Years later, entering his London *pied à terre* was described by one visitor as "like walking into a bottle of Ribena".

In the early 1980s he moved to Los Angeles where he ran a nightclub called the Bla Bla Café. "One night," he later recalled, "a psychic poet called Charles John Quarto came in and gave me a reading. He told me everything that was going to unfold, that I was going to be a big-time media personality with a column read by millions, big in astrology." He returned to Leeds and took a diploma from the Faculty of Astrological Studies in London.

Newspaper astrology has been popular in the UK ever since the *Sunday Express* ran the first column in 1930, to greet the birth of Princess Margaret. Cainer began working as an astrologer for *Today* in 1986, transferring to the *Daily Mail* in 1992 and the *Daily Express* in 2000. Some estimates put his basic salary at the *Mail* at about £75,000, topped up with £100,000 or so a year from his earnings from the premium-rate phonelines associated with his column. He was also allowed to promote his "private horoscope" business, and by 2000 his website Cainer.com was valued at £50 million. Although his salary at the *Express* remained broadly the same, he won a greater share of revenues from the phone line. In March 2001 he moved to the *Daily Mirror* where reports regularly estimated his annual income at £2 million. Four years later, he returned to the *Daily Mail*. "The deal that's taking him to the *Mail* must be massive," observed Rosie Boycott, who had previously poached Cainer for the *Express*.

Over the years he appeared regularly in *Private Eye*'s "Street of Shame" column, where he was variously described as "the goblin-faced astrologer", "a raving egomaniac" and "the bearded soothsayer". Richard Dawkins branded him a charlatan, and Cainer himself sometimes came close to pleading guilty to the charge, admitting, in an interview with the *Guardian* in 2000, that having Mercury in Capricorn "blesses you with the ability to sound like you know what you're talking about even when you're spouting rubbish". He firmly believed in astrology, he maintained, but it was a belief system which got a bit "stretched" by having to make predictions based on star signs.

He based his formula on a simple understanding of human psychology: "You read your horoscope when your partner's splitting up from you, when your domestic life is crap. You look at your horoscope because you're desperate, you'll look anywhere. So to that extent it makes no difference what sign you are, or where the planets are. My job is to be philosophical and to offer encouragement, to say, 'Look, when you're in a rough period, learn through it.'"

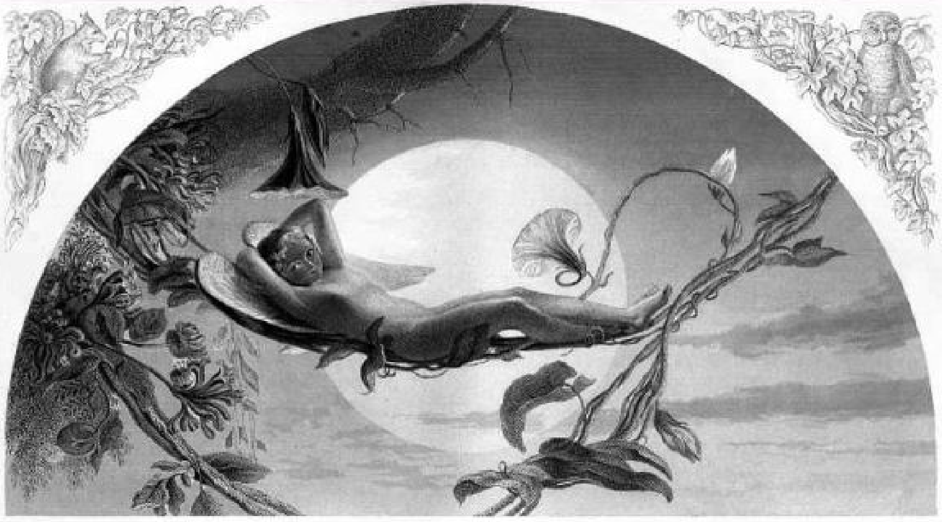
When not in London, Cainer spent his time in a farmhouse on the River Ouse in Yorkshire, with a brood of children from three different mothers. His long-term partner Melanie, mother of three of his children, died after a car crash in 1992. He claimed to have seen her ghost appear to him at the very moment that she passed away during surgery. He said he continued to converse with her spirit. His final horoscope for Sagittarius (his own sun sign) was appropriate: "We aren't here for long. We should make the most of every moment."

Jonathan Cainer, newspaper astrologer, born Surbiton, Surrey 18 Dec 1957; died (heart attack) 2 May 2016, aged 58.

BRAJRAJ MAHAPATRA

Brajraj was the last surviving Indian king from the days of the British Raj. His heavily forested kingdom, Tigeria, in the eastern Indian state of Orissa, was the smallest princely state in India – just 45 square miles (117km^2). He came to the throne on 1943 and became known for his hedonistic lifestyle: he owned 25 cars and jeeps and was a keen big game hunter. In 1947 he signed the instrument of accession to an independent India, and in 1960 sold his palace to the state government for 75,000 rupees (£900). He received a small stipend from the government until Indira Gandhi abolished the payments in 1975. The ex-monarch spent his final years in a mud hut with some plastic chairs. "The asbestos roof is leaking, so a torn tarpaulin sheet covers his wooden cot," wrote a journalist in 2013. "There are a few books, a plastic saline bottle, a torch, some raw tomatoes and lots of cobwebs." Asked if he was happy, Brajraj replied: "Then I was king. Now I'm a pauper. But I have no regrets whatsoever." Although he relied on the help of local villagers, when he did have money himself – as a life member of the governing council of Rajkumar College, he received a small stipend – he gave much of it away. He is survived by three sons and two daughters.

Brajraj Khyatriya Birabara Champati Singh Mahapatra, Raja of Tigiria, born 15 October 1921; died 30 Nov 2015, aged 94.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

FAIRY BANDITS

There has long been a minority opinion among British folklore writers that Robin Hood was, in origin, a fairy. After all, he and his Merry Men lived in a wood, they wore green and they had arrows: fairies were famous for 'elf shot' that killed cattle and sometimes human neighbours as well. Then there is the much less publicised notion, but one that perhaps has more to recommend it, that real-life outlaws pretended, bizarre as this may seem, to be fairies. There is a fascinating record from Kent from 1450 – I owe this reference to Richard Green's *Elf Queens and Holy Friars* – where leaders of a peasant uprising describe themselves as the King and Queen of Fairy. In 1489, meanwhile, a rebellion at the other end of the country was announced in the name of "Mayster Hobbe Hyrste", a northern hobgoblin ("Robyn Godfelaws brodyr he is").

REAL-LIFE OUTLAWS PRETENDED, BIZARRE AS THIS MAY SEEM, TO BE FAIRIES

These two fragments are unambiguous. More complex are the rumours that reach us about the Gwylliaid Cochion ('red goblins') from Merionethshire in Wales. There is doubt as to whether these were fairies recorded as bandits or bandits who were remembered as fairies, or just a mistranslation of Welsh. In any case, one source, which is regrettably late, assures us that in 1534 local aristocrats fell upon the Gwylliaid Cochion and hanged close to 100 of these 'goblins': not the normal fate of supernatural entities. Fairy bandits cluster, on this evidence, from about 1450-1550. But there are some 18th- and 19th-century clues that hint at a continuing underground tradition. So there is an example from the Hebrides of crofters blaming vandalism against their landlords on 'the fairies'. There is also an instance (in a well-grounded mid-19th century novel) of a group of illegal strikers dressing themselves up with holly and ribbons and using the password "t' boggart o' Deerpley Fell" in the south Pennines. Then, of course, there are the Fenians, a name for Fionn and his companions, the supernatural defenders of Ireland from foreign oppression, and a moniker for Irish patriots and nationalists.

And why is there this connection between outlaw activity and the world of fairy? Perhaps blaming the fairies gives you a useful legal alibi of the it-wasn't-me-it-was-the-fey type? 'Spectral evidence' was always, even in witchcraft trials, treated with caution. Perhaps by dressing up as fairies (in much the same way protestors from the 17th to the 19th century dressed up in women's clothes), you are disguising yourself *and* creating a strong group identity. Or just possibly there is the notion that paranormal entities are on the side of social justice: something that will come as a surprise to anyone who knows the aristocratic habits of the Tuatha dé Danann or Oberon and his court.

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

the UFO files

FORTEAN TIMES presents our monthly section featuring regular sighting reports, reviews of classic cases, entries on major ufological topics and hands-on advice for UFO investigators. **The UFO Files** will benefit from your input, so don't hesitate to submit your suggestions and questions.

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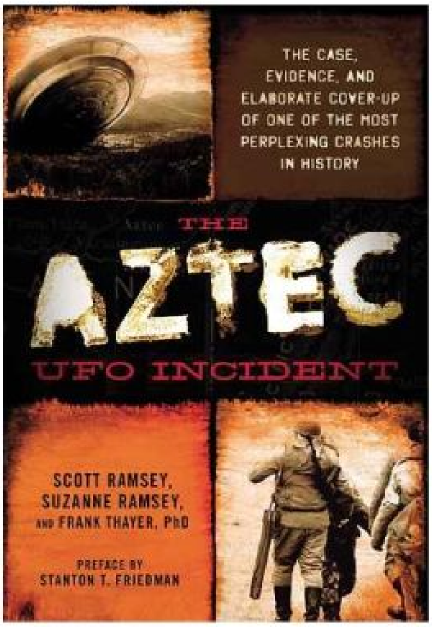
FLYING SORCERY

PETER BROOKESMITH PRESENTS HIS REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

OIL AND VINEGAR

Readers should have little difficulty remembering the alleged crash of a flying saucer near Aztec, New Mexico (see **FT181:30-36**), the pivotal role in the tale of one Silas Newton, and the resurrection of the case by Scott and Suzanne Ramsey. Their book *The Aztec Incident* has enjoyed two reviews in FT, one by me and more recently one of the second edition by Nigel Watson, the latter generating some correspondence on the letters pages. One of the problems with both the case and the book is the character of Newton. The skeptics' position has always been that he was a con man. Not only did he gull journalist Frank Scully into writing the credulous *Behind the Flying Saucers*, but sundry others into buying hokey oil-deposit-detecting bits of kit, for which he was in due course convicted of fraud. The Ramseys on the other hand maintain by default that Newton was a genuine big cheese of an oilman, both "famous" and "wildly successful" at finding oil, although they never produce much hard evidence for that. Now, thanks to Denver geologist Dan Plazak, guest-posting on Robert Sheaffer's blog (http://badufos.blogspot.co.uk/2016/05/facts-about-silas-newtons-claimed.html), we have a better handle on who Newton really was and what he actually did in the oil business.

Well, not much, actually. Says Plazak: "In Kansas, Newton drilled one dry hole and at least one producer; his FBI file from 1941 mentions 'three small producing wells' in Kansas, giving him about $200 per month. In California, Newton drilled six dry holes, and no producers. In Wyoming, he drilled seven dry holes, and no producers. In Arizona, he drilled six dry holes and no producers. It's no shame to drill a dry hole on a wildcat location, if you have good reason to think there might be oil there, but Newton was the opposite of 'wildly successful'." The Ramseys maintain that oil companies would "reap embarrassment" when, having leased unproductive fields to Newton, he would discover deep and profitable reserves in them. Remarks Plazak: "Frank Scully started this nonsense when he passed along Newton's bragging that he had 'rediscovered' the Rangely Oil Field in Colorado. Newton did no such thing [as Plazak shows in meticulous detail], and Rangely appears to have been a financial debacle for him. Now *The Aztec UFO Incident* shows how myths grow in the retelling, by changing the single Rangely Field into the plural 'fields.' Of course, the book does not name these additional oil fields where Newton supposedly worked his magic." The Ramseys claim that by the late 1940s, Newton was "so wealthy that he had no need to swindle anyone", to which Plazak responds: "Newton's finances appear to have started to unravel in 1929, with the crash… by the late 1940s, Newton was being dunned by creditors, and in 1952 could not afford his $5,000 bail." He adds, rather damningly: "Page 100 of *The Aztec UFO Incident* even shows an article from a Denver daily newspaper, Oct. 19, 1952, discussing Newton's inability to pay his bail."


THE CASE, EVIDENCE, AND ELABORATE COVER-UP OF ONE OF THE MOST PERPLEXING CRASHES IN HISTORY
THE
AZTEC
UFO INCIDENT
SCOTT RAMSEY, SUZANNE RAMSEY, AND FRANK THAYER, PhD
PREFACE BY STANTON T. FRIEDMAN

LEFT: Scott and Suzanne Ramsey's book on the Aztec incident. **BELOW:** Silas Newton.

> **The skeptics' position is that Newton was a con man**

Plazak then goes on to demolish every claim the Ramseys make about Newton and his supposedly reverse-engineered 'doodlebug' and its alleged connection to magnetic detection devices coming from GSI (later Texas Instruments). As he says, "The Ramseys' book… makes a complete hash of the history of magnetic research during World War II. Although peripheral to the Aztec crash, these glaring errors reflect poorly on the supposed 28 years of research that went into the book." Needless to say, nothing in Newton's real history leads to anything reverse-engineered, other than perhaps his own approach to the truth.

So – one may mutter darkly about ufology being stuck in old stuff, but it's always fun when someone comes along to show in excruciating new particulars that some old stuff really should be left to moulder.

SAGE AND ONION

Attentive readers may have been wondering into what Other Dimension those intrepid and unrepentant ufological Yorkshiremen, Dr David Clarke and his constant shadow person Andy Roberts, have vanished. Or slipped, or been Taken. And whether they will reappear in these pages. In the highest traditions of ufology, the answers are an odd *mélange* of truth and rumour.

David Clarke says that his last word on the subject was his book *How UFOs Conquered the World* (Aurum 2015), and he now wants to spend more time on his other interests in folklore. But he hasn't retired entirely from the field. "I intend to continue collecting, curating and occasionally writing about the arcane aspects of the subject that interest me," he adds. "I also have to oversee the release of one final batch of MoD files (due in the next couple of months)." He feels the best place to present his thoughts now is his blog, although he will, no doubt, be making the occasional guest appearance in this column. Andy Roberts, on the other hand, seems to have vanished, an astonishing feat indeed for one of such amiable bulk. The word on the street is that he has joined an obscure cult of some kind, one somehow associated with owls. One hopes this doesn't involve depraved rituals, and is of a more elegant Athenean nature. If I bump into him hanging around the Parthenon, I will let you know.

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES REPORTS ON A SHADOWY ORGANISATION INTIMIDATING UFO WITNESSES

WHO WATCHES THE WATCHERS?

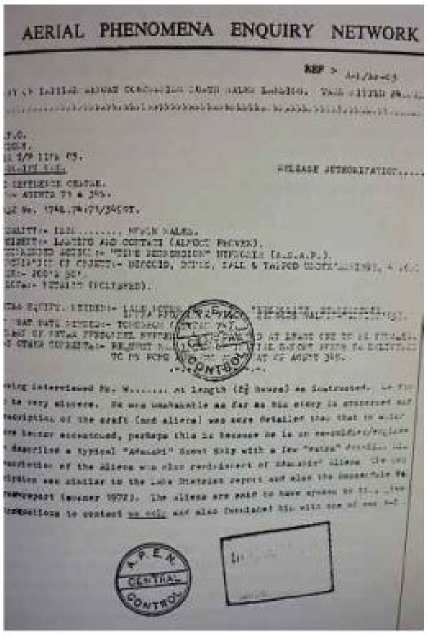
I was recently working with a UFO witness who was documenting the story of his close encounter. During this process I learnt many things about a fascinating case that have not been revealed before. One of the most intriguing claims the witness made was of being 'watched', in the aftermath of the sighting, by forces whose origin we can only speculate about. He reported various incidents: being warned off, having phone conversations 'tapped', and even being followed by strangers tracking his every move connected with the case. He fully appreciates that this story sounds like paranoia, though his claims appear to have real substance.

It seems probable that someone, for some reason, was treating him more like a terrorist suspect than a person who saw something odd in the sky: but why would anybody take such interest in someone just because they had experienced a close encounter? It's unlikely to have been the Ministry of Defence, given that their interest in UFOs has been minimal, even in well-known cases, and they hardly ever met with witnesses, let alone risked covert surveillance.

Interestingly, another thing happened to me this month touching on these issues. As a full-time carer, I do almost no media interviews these days, but recently agreed to one that prompted a question connected with the Rendlesham Forest case (see **FT336:24-25** et al). This referenced a widespread notion – 'leaked' by someone – that my interest in the case stemmed from my active participation in the nuclear disarmament movement. This idea bamboozled me, because I have never had any such association either overtly or covertly.

So was it a misunderstanding? Or – as was suggested to me by someone connected with the Rendlesham events – had my (non-existent) CND affiliation been 'leaked' by some covert 'agency' in a deliberate attempt to damage my reputation regarding the case? Well, I had a couple of phone conversations in 1984 with an aerospace scientist briefly interested in Rendlesham who suggested that the recovery of material from a nuclear motor on a Soviet satellite might be involved. It seemed a bizarre theory at the time and has never to my knowledge been supported by any evidence. I was advised to steer clear of this matter, though whether the warning would have worked is moot because there was never any evidence to suggest it was worth pursuing. But I can see how some rumour about my nuclear disarmament allegiance might have emerged – especially if it was beneficial for someone, somewhere, to muddy the waters around this case and make it seem as if a UFO researcher or a witness had ulterior motives.

When I discovered from the witness mentioned above that he was also approached and 'warned' by a stranger not to talk publicly unless 'approval' was granted, presumably by some shadowy agency keeping tabs on the UFO movement, bells started to ring.


AERIAL PHENOMENA ENQUIRY NETWORK

A.P.E.N. CENTRAL CONTROL

LEFT: A document sent to me in 1975, purporting to be a 'covert' investigation of what we now know as the Berwyn Mountains case of January 1974.

JENNY RANDLES

What if someone out there is playing games with the UFO community? What if that someone is watching the watchers and trying to control the rules of engagement and the wider perspective of both witnesses and researchers? What motive could they have for such actions?

All of which brought my mind back to the subject of APEN – Aerial Phenomenon Enquiry Network – one of the weirdest 'cases' I have been involved with and the subject of an intriguing debate on the (ATS) 'Above Top Secret' UFO/conspiracy web site over recent weeks that reached some interesting conclusions.

APEN were a mysterious bunch who surfaced in 1974 claiming to be a covert, privately funded 'ultra' UFO investigation team with numerous 'contacts' (including aliens!) and the ability to get a heads-up on big cases. Over a period of years I was one of several ufologists in the UK who received both letters and taped messages from these people. They were quite crazy and used military-type codes and styling. Their tapes made silly pronouncements, played war marches and were sprinkled with extremist trappings.

Yet APEN appeared to have their finger on the pulse of British ufology at a time when we were trying to unite disparate groups into a cohesive set-up and coordinate dozens of small teams scattered around the UK. We had some success over the next 25 years, creating first a 'Northern UFO Network' (NUFON), then a national set-up linking BUFORA and the leading magazine of the time, *Flying Saucer Review*. But APEN seemed to find ways to applaud these efforts whilst in the next breath subtly undermining them with outrageous antics. So odd was this that the recent ATS debate suggests there were really two 'APENs' – with the second version created by an anti-terrorist agency out to discredit the efforts of the first APEN, who were a genuine extremist body infiltrating UFO research. A 'secret source' within the agency has revealed information seemingly supporting this idea to researcher Nick Redfern.

APEN would know things about the private lives of UFO researchers and reveal them in their tapes. So this was an 'inside job' involving UFO-aware people. They would set one group against another by implying ulterior motives that were never credible. Crucially, I knew the allegations APEN made about me were false (a newspaper ad placed in my name with my unlisted phone number for agents to ring up!), so I could reasonably infer that what they said about others was equally fictitious.

At one point, people stopped contacting me and I discovered that they had got letters from 'me' offering paid jobs in a secret government agency – but only if they quit public UFO research and kept silent as to why. I still wonder who I might have 'scared off' and whether they're even now awaiting 'my' job offer.

APEN did have a few covert meetings with some groups and gave me a 'clue' about Rendlesham – to chase 'brown bears' (Russian satellites). They then invited me to meet them in the dead of night at a remote railway station to 'learn more'. Needless to say, I did no such thing. They even used tactics that got local investigators into trouble with police by calling cops out to bogus UFO sightings and claiming to be that local group. They stole documents from one UFO team in a house break-in and invaded another's office and scattered files around. APEN was adept at sowing division and distrust. Their mantra appeared in a 'welcome to your new home' card sent to me on the day that I moved to an address that few then knew. It read: *Never call anyone bigger than yourself stupid*. I had just publicly dismissed them as a bunch of meddlesome cranks.

As far as I know, APEN faded out in the 1990s – but, of course, they may have simply changed tactics or cover. Some researchers believe that they were right wing activists inside a couple of the UFO groups involved in the creation of NUFON. Interestingly, one person suspected of being an 'APEN agent' was implicated by the UFO witness I mentioned at the beginning of this column, who claims he was followed and silenced.

Was it just a game of bluff, or double bluff, within ufology? Or did APEN have divisive political aims and were using the UFO community as a test-bed for more serious disruptive activity? Few outsiders would take seriously the ravings of 'UFO buffs' or witnesses about being followed by some shadowy agency and being warned about telling their stories in public. We were easy playthings.

If witnesses have been intimidated to a greater degree than we ever imagined by an organisation with resources that allowed them to follow innocent people – which is what my witness infers – then we have to wonder if some dark part of the UFO world has very different motives for their interest than those shared by readers of this magazine.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

63 AN ARIOSOPHIST ON MARS

THEO PAIJMANS looks back at the Aryan esotericist who received messages from the Red Planet

Years before Adamski's blond Venusians landed on Earth, their blond Martian counterparts explicitly avoided contact with our planet; or so said German ariosophist Friedrich Bernhard Marby (1882-1966, pictured at right). 'Ariosophy' was a term coined by the most famous proponent of this 'Aryan' esoteric doctrine also known as 'Armanism', Lans von Liebenfels, and Marby had learned of its existence through the writings of Guido von List, the other influential Austrian ariosophist.

In 1924, Marby founded his magazine *Der Eigene Weg* ("Own Way") and later a publishing company to spread the ariosophical gospel and his ideas about runes and Runic Gymnastics.[1] The editorial mix of *Der Eigene Weg* consisted of rune lore, 'the racial question', 'true folkdom', astrology and the occasional distasteful essay such as Marby's "From The Sex-life of the Female", in which he wrote that due to "the mixture with the blood of the lower human races, the distinctive mark of Aryan high culture gradually perished".[2] In the second issue, he introduced a new element: the planet Mars and its inhabitants. The Americans had tried to communicate with the people on Mars, Marby noted, and "unexplainable rhythmic waves in the sea of ether" had been received: "… so the question arose if Mars not only was inhabited, but if the Martians were higher developed than mankind and if they were able to send 'wireless' messages to us."[3] Marby assured his readers that the fact "that conscious beings live on Mars is already well known by the sages," and he remarked that "in common parlance too one may hear here and there the word: I have already lived once, in the stars."[4] Marby felt compelled to tackle the issue because news had reached him that "an American professor has succeeded in establishing a wireless connection with the Martians. How far this report is correct, we can't impossibly verify here in Germany… This writer also knows of very significant trials with electrical energy of a very special nature, with the help of mediums in American test environments. The waves, created in a test station, have evoked nervous conditions in certain sensitive persons here in Germany, that continued to have an effect for hours afterwards…"[5] With regard to the strange signals, Marby further remarked that "the unknown transmitter of the enigmatic messages is being sought by some as originating with a people, a remnant of the prehistoric-Aryan true culture, residing in a still undiscovered land in the vicinity of the North Pole in North-East Asia. The advanced initiates know that all cultures we have these days are but a shadow of the Aryan culture that once radiated from North-East Asia over the entire Earth."[6]

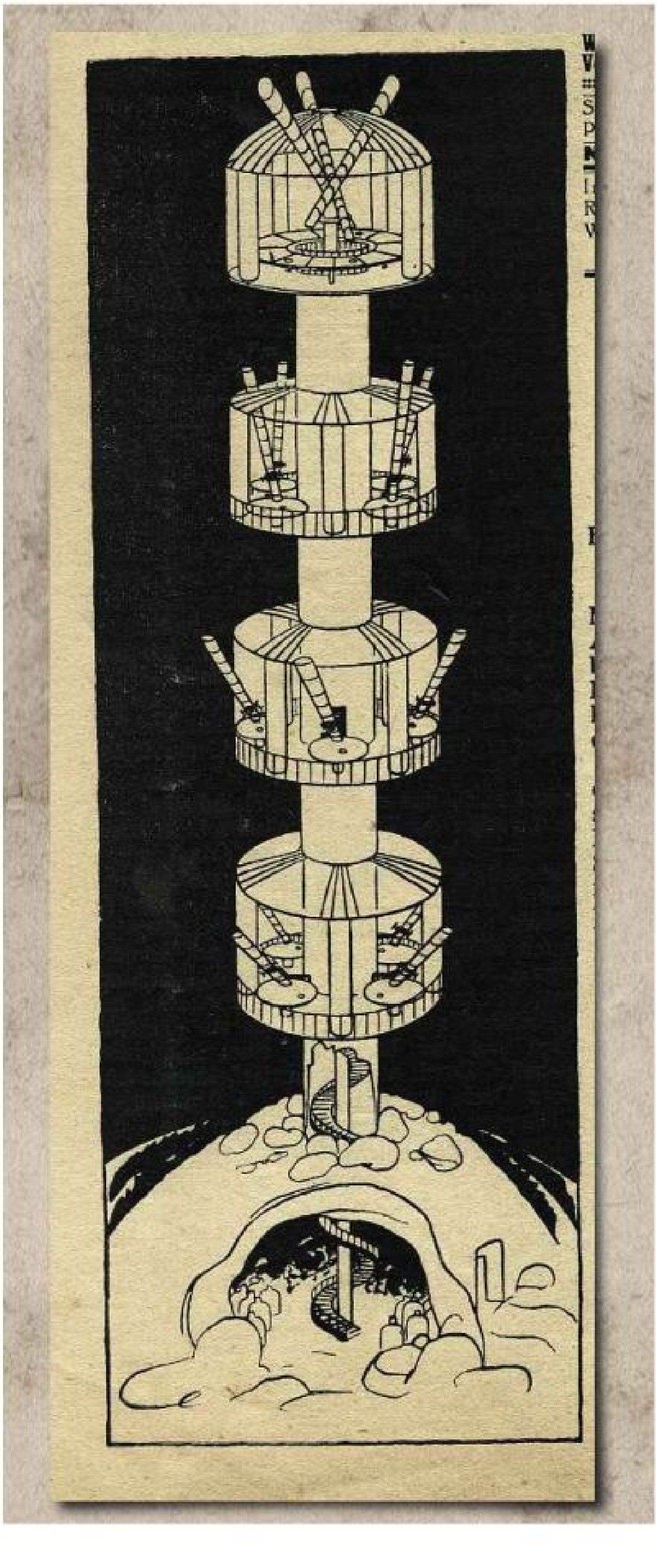
Marby also explains how he came to view life on Mars. In short, the brain secretes extracts that "transform each brain cell into an electrolytic element of special tension and vibration. Around these cells od-chemical [deriving from the 'Odic Force'] substances gather". Thus, Marby claims, the brain becomes a receiver for messages "that come from occult experiences on Mars".[7] If the above sounds abstruse, it is typical of the worldview of the ariosophist. Lans von Liebenfels, foreshadowing the ancient astronaut hypothesis, explained the Aryan race as the product of a meticulous breeding programme conducted by "higher beings" named Theozoa, Elektrozoa and Angels, who had lived on Earth in the remote past.[8] Aryans were "perfect electro-biotic machines" who mastered the "metaphysical spaces of the fourth, fifth and nth dimensions", navigating these spaces by means of an "electro-magneto-radiophotic eye on their forehead" of which we still carry the rudiment, better known as the pineal gland. Not only could Liebenfels's Aryans "read past, present and future from the ether", their bodies could "discharge rays of fire and light… breaking down atoms and reconstructing them, negating gravity."[9] This was the stratum of weirdness that Marby had chosen to explore.

> "At particular times the atmosphere of the Earth is populated with terrible sexual demons which thrive under the influence of the star Algol"

What would Mars be without a description of the Martians? Germany harboured a significant tradition regarding this. As early as 1790 a man from Earth had visited Mars in a balloon – at least in a German novel.[10] In the 19th and 20th centuries Germany had its fair share of Mars-themed science fiction books. Percy Greg's *Across the Zodiac* (1880) was translated into German in 1882. Kurt Lasswitz's *Auf Zwei Planeten* was published in 1897, the same year as Wells's *War of the Worlds* was serialised and is held by many to be superior to the latter. Marby's Martians lack the refinement of Greg's or Lasswitz's examples. They are new, though, in one aspect: they mirror the Aryan superman. "Mars is inhabited by only one race. This race of Martians is a kind of man, very similarly built to us, but in general more slender and taller. The face of the people on Mars is long, oval shaped, the hair shining blond and the skin shiny white. What is most striking about the people of Mars is their calmness in their entire being…"[11] We also meet Vandanisski, the 'Martian human' who again is a perfect example of the Ariosophical ideal: "Vandanisski is now 18 years old. Tall and slender and blond is he, the image of a youth which we do not know here on Earth."[12]

Marby's Martians, unlike so many other alien races, actively avoid visiting Earth: "Not only the greedy thoughts of man are to be feared, but at particular times the atmosphere of the Earth is populated with terrible sexual demons which thrive under special constellations and also under the influence of the star Algol.[13] This star favours the incarnations of murderers, killers, vivisectionists and sadists. When people raise children under the influence of this poisoned atmosphere, the soul of the child will be exchanged or marked by the influence of a demon… In earlier times such cases were spoken of as changelings."[14] Instead, the Martians send us pure and good thoughts through the atmosphere by means of gestures "Earthmen would perhaps recognise as praying".[15]

The Martians also possess stupendous technology, found in giant spires that dot the landscape: “It is night – millions of stars shine in the heavenly dome, but with a more reddish hue than on Earth. We are at a little distance from a city, in the midst of a lake of beautiful flowers the chalices of which, half-closed, breathe sweet scents into the silent beauty of the heavens… So we proceed along the winding path through the night. With us walks the leader in silence. There! In front of us a sudden flash! In front of us a tower radiates in all colours. Like a giant flame it radiates over all the flower fields and offers an image so beautiful and colourful, as has never been seen before by a human eye…”[16] These towers (one is shown at right, from *Der Eigene Weg*, No 7, 1924) house a novel energy transmutation technology. “Hundreds of star power transformers are available on Mars. With every city we find three to six of these receiving stations for cosmic energies. Preferably they are built in the vicinity of waters or lakes. Since water on Mars is not as plentiful as on Earth, one often has to go without it. These collecting stations for cosmic rays… are constructed of light, very hard metal, very sturdy and capable of resisting the many storms that seek to raze them to the ground. A delicate mechanism transforms each building into a work of art, its purpose and uniqueness still not attained on Earth. Although thousands of years ago the Aryan initiates created similar things (towers that reached into Heaven)…” In circular rooms, thin rods float near the ceiling and extract energy from the air to provide lighting. In hallways, light is directly emitted from walls built from a material that transforms the waves they capture into light. The rays from the stars that these towers collect are transformed into “fluid electricity” and bottled in shiny flasks with silver caps, which are placed in rows in storage rooms inside the towers.[17]



In Marby’s mind, the Red Planet symbolised Utopia. He revels in painting Martian society as a ritualistic, almost rural society where life is very plain and simple – descriptions of Martian technology are actually quite rare – and there is no murder, theft or money. The last instalment ends with a ‘to be continued’, but this was not to be.

After having discovered the ariosophists, Marby plunged into the world of mystic runes, Aryans and racist occultism. He was an innovator in rune occultism, claiming that to experience the healing properties of the runes, one had to imitate their form with gymnastic postures while chanting their names. His publishing company and the foundation of his *Union of German Rune Researchers* failed to attain the success he hoped for and he had eventually to declare for bankruptcy. Unable to pay his bills, and falling foul of the Nazis, he was arrested in 1937, sent to jail, and in 1938 to a series of concentration camps. He was released from Dachau in 1945. His attempts to obtain compensation from the German state for his imprisonment failed. Although he tried to paint himself and his pre-WWII activities as a form of resistance, his anti-Semitism and SS patron membership from 1934 till 1936 did not help. Till his death in 1966 he published pamphlets on rune gymnastics and the magazine *Forschung und Erfahrung*.[18] Although Marby had promised to publish “Vandanisski, the Martian and his life” once the series was finished as “a booklet”,[19] I have found no evidence he ever did.

NOTES

1 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890-1935*, Aquarian Press, 1985, pp160-161; Bernd Wedemeyer, ‘Runengymnastik: Zur Religiosität völkischer Körperkultur’, in: Stefanie v. Schurbein, Justus H Ulbricht, *Völkische Religion und Krisen der Moderne*, Königshausen & Neumann, 2001, pp367-385.

2 ‘Aus dem Sexualleben des Weibes’, *Der Eigene Weg*, Nr.6, 1, Aug 1924, 1. Jahrgang, p49.

3 ‘Nachrichten vom Mars?’, *Der Eigene Weg*, Nr. 2, 1, April 1924, 1. Jahrgang, p1.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid, p10.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid, p11.

8 Lans von Liebenfels, *Bibliomystikon oder die Geheimbidel der Eingeweihten*, Vol. II: *Daemonozoikon*, Pforzheim, 1931, p58

9 Lans von Liebenfels, *Bibliomystikon oder die Geheimbidel der Eingeweihten*, , Vol. III: *Theozoikon*, Pressbaum bei Wien, 1931, p40.

10 Carl Ignaz Geiger, *Reise eines Erdbewohners in den Mars*: http://digitale.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/vd18/content/titleinfo/5127496.

11 ‘Weitere Nachrichten vom Mars?’, *Der Eigene Weg*, Nr.3, 1, May 1924, 1. Jahrgang, p22.

12 ‘Vandanisski, der Marsmensch’, *Der Eigene Weg*, Anfang Nov 1924, 2. Jahrgang, Nr. 10, p87.

13 The German science fiction film *Algol – The Tragedy Of Power* was released in 1920, featuring an alien who visits earth and brings as a gift a technological device.

14 ‘Vandanisski, der Marsmench und sein Leben’, *Der Eigene Weg*, Nr.6, 1, Aug 1924, 1. Jahrgang, pp48-49

15 ‘Vandanisski, der Marsmench und sein Leben’, *Der Eigene Weg*, Nr.4, 1. June 1924, 1. Jahrgang, page 30.

16 Marby, Mars-Türme für die Umwandlung der Sternenkraft in ,,flüssige Elektrizität . Ein Turm und dessen Einrichtung nach Okkulter Schauung. , *Der Eigene Weg*, Nr.7, Anfang September 1924, 1. Jahrgang, pages 57-59

17 Ibid.

18 For Marby’s biographical data, see sources from note 1.

19 Marby mentions this intention in *Der Eigene Weg*, Nr.6, August 1924, page 49.

THE ENCHA

The Isle of Wight has long been one of Britain's most popular holiday destinations, and yet beneath its tranquil surface lurks a half-forgotten world of powerful strangeness. **ROGER CLARKE** returns to his childhood home to find it's still an enchanted island, full of pagan lore, hauntings, and timeslips...

'Certain it is, that this island of Wight was not an early convert to Christianity; nay, there is some reason to doubt whether it was entirely converted'

Henry Fielding, *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* (1755)

In the summer of 1981 I found myself on the beach at St Helens in the Isle of Wight with the ghost-hunter Andrew Green. I was then 17 years old. As we sat in deckchairs and looked out to sea, his wife Norah pouring tea from a thermos, one of the things we discussed – and this was our first meeting – was a recent magazine article proposing that the Isle of Wight was a profoundly magical and otherworldly place – an 'Enchanted Isle'.[1] This was an image quite at odds with the usual perception of the island – a cheap-as-chips holiday destination, a mecca for coach parties doing one-day-round-the-island trips ending in cream teas, or school excursions where a fumbling first sexual encounter was sometimes gratefully achieved. Above all it was a retirement haven, dated and down-at-heel, where people waited in patches of sunlight for their grandchildren to visit.

The article we were discussing had been written by Brian Innes[2] for the popular 1980s paranormal part-work magazine *The Unexplained*. Innes, I have since found out, was a successful musician and a founding partner in the firm Orbis who published *The Unexplained*. His premise was intriguing: the Isle of Wight was a hub of ancient forces and forgotten rites.

My father farmed at Presford and Bowcombe, and being in the farming community knew everyone who lived in or farmed in the areas described by Innes. Growing up in the 1970s on the rural Isle of Wight was to experience a world now quite vanished, a world Thomas Hardy would have recognised, with heavy dialect quite common. Aged seven, I danced around the maypole at Shorwell Primary School, leaving the school desks empty with the

FIVE BARROWS BRONZE AGE CEMETERY ON BROOK DOWN: STEVE SPELLER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ANTED ISLE

charged vacancy of Summerisle. I knew the local names for things, birds, and flowers. There was an entity I've only ever heard about on the island, an insect-demon called The Gooseberry Wife that preyed on the soft bodies of children, as recounted by WH Long,[3] as if William Burroughs wrote *The Tempest*.

By the year I met Andrew Green, I was becoming constitutionally more sceptical; hence my transition from a correspondence with Peter Underwood to a correspondence with Andrew. He had been especially impressed by a local ghost book called *Ghosts of the Isle of Wight* by Gay Steedman (now Baldwin) and the late Ray Anker,[4] from which Innes appeared to have borrowed some key elements for his piece in *The Unexplained*. In the hot summer of 1976 Gay had visited the haunted room in our family house, then in Shorwell, and written it up in *Ghosts*, thus contributing greatly to my interest in the subject of the paranormal. One thing that stood out from Gay's work was the impressive capacity of the Isle of Wight for timeslips.

THE ISLE HAS AN IMPRESSIVE CAPACITY FOR TIMESLIPS

INSULA VECTIS

It was as I expected.

Reading it now, after 35 years have elapsed, Innes's theory doesn't stand up to much scrutiny. But it doesn't matter. He probably could have made a better case now. He didn't, for example, have available David Tomalin's 1987 book *Roman Wight* to aid him, with its images of Janus and Celtic heads and Roman finds from Brading, including crescent-like, vaguely lunar roof-tile 'tegulæ' marks.

Amongst the less evidence-based arguments Innes provided for the Isle of Wight's sacred status was a diagram showing 'ley lines' that he claimed touched either side of the island. What Innes would have given to know then about the Belinus Line, which was really only discovered in the 1990s.[5] This ley, it is said, is possibly the biggest and most important there is, travelling across the whole length of the United Kingdom from Scotland to, yes, the Isle of Wight's Yaverland, via Quarr Abbey and the Brading Roman Villa (which plays a crucial role in Innes's contention that the Isle of Wight was a Mithraic centre for the occupying Roman army).

Still, Innes worked with what he had. He saw the Isle of Wight as a strange kind of

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diamond-shaped prism, with a truly unusual symmetrical shape and a snake-serpent line of 'firestone'/chalk hills which he felt suggested a representation on Earth of the passage of the Moon. Surely, he argued, ancient priesthoods would have noticed this remarkable coincidence.

The island's Roman name is 'Insula Vectis'. This may mean 'lever', that is, a kind of fulcrum on which the United Kingdom sits. The Isle of Wight is, with fortean aptness, associated with pendulums: perfect for a geologically unstable environment. Robert Hooke, a native son, whose father was a clergyman at Freshwater, invented the anchor escarpment for the pendulum clock and, some years later, the balance spring of the pocket-watch. The seismological pendulum equipment developed by John Milne for Japan was further refined in his house in Shide after his retirement in 1895, and deployed in the Isle of Wight, detecting earthquakes as far away as the 1906 San Francisco disaster; its phosphorescent detection system was mistaken for a countryside phantasm. It was Milne who discovered the 'ring of fire' seismological faults that bedevil the Far East and Japan in particular, and he retired to the island with his Japanese wife. His equipment showed the Isle of Wight to be almost constantly moving. The locals suspected something otherworldly: "Slight movements in his instruments' lights at night was enough to convince drinkers at the Barley Mow pub that the Isle of Wight was tipping up and down. Others thought it was the sign of ghosts in the field". [6]

THE LOCALS SUSPECTED SOMETHING OTHERWORLDY

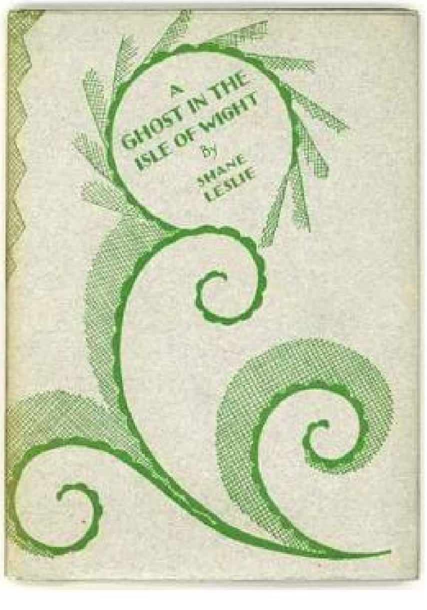
The whole subject of the mutable nature of time was a great inspiration to the writer JB Priestley, who lived both at Brook House and Billingham Manor, a famously haunted island house also briefly rented by another writer, Shane Leslie, who wrote a novella masquerading as truth about his experience of seeing the severed head of Charles I appear behind the panelling there in the late 1920s. I remember visiting Billingham Manor as a child, as my father kept sheep in the field opposite. Shane Leslie was also famous for his *Ghost Book* of 1955, but his sanctified head of the martyr-king story reminds me of all the born-again Catholicism that cooked up the Brown Lady of Raynham Hall. That he also chose the scent of Madonna lilies as a Billingham haunting is wreathed with High Church inflections. It might as well have been incense.

Charles I, imprisoned at Carisbrooke Castle, was not the only Royal who suffered from the monarchical crepuscular – Queen Victoria spent her later years at Osbourne effectively in constant communion with the dead. Or, as that other notable inhabitant of the Isle of Wight, David Icke, might say, practising black magic in her reptile vivarium.

In Freshwater, Tennyson spent a great deal of time summoning up the past, mainly a mythical past of Arthurian myth, striding the hills as he composed *Idylls of a King*. He was the Posidonian druid to Victoria's Boudicca, slowly calcifying. "That southern island / Where the wild Tennyson became a fossil," wrote WH Auden.

Time does something strange on the Isle of Wight.

A HUDSON / TOPICAL PRESS AGENCY / GETTY IMAGES



TOP: The famously haunted Billingham Manor. **ABOVE LEFT:** The house was home to JB Priestley, seen here in its modernised interior in 1933. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Another author, Shane Leslie, lived in Billingham in the 1920s, writing of his experience of seeing the severed head of Charles I appearing behind the panelling.

SLIPPAGES

The Isle of Wight was, according to the Venerable Bede, the very last place in England to be Christianised. It proved extremely resistant to conversion and required two attempts, resulting in the virtual extermination of its populace in AD 686. After Alan Clarke's film *Penda's Fen* (recently released on DVD by the BFI; see review p65) most people think that Penda was the last pagan king of England, but it was in fact King Arvald on the Isle of Wight; and it was Penda's converted son, Wulfere of Mercia, who began the brutal process against the 'idolaters' of this strange and once heavily wooded island in the English Channel.

A troubled and violent history has seen its population almost extinguished or evacuated on two or three occasions in the last 1,000 years. It flipped in and out of being part of England in the few hundred years after the Norman Conquest, being eventually, and probably fraudulently, acquired for the Crown from its 'queen' Isabella De Fortibus [7] on her deathbed. It's a tale of constituencies and sovereignty quite apt for out times (the event was turned into a novel by Julian Barnes).[8] It's possible, albeit faintly, that legally the Isle of Wight is not part of Great Britain.

It seems likely that in those far-off days when the island was inhabited by the Celtic Belgæ tribe, it held a position not dissimilar to that other druidic island, Anglesey. Maybe it predates Anglesey in the hierarchy of the sacred. One admittedly rather doubtful school of etymological thought has the word 'Wight' in the 'Isle of Wight' coming from the Norwegian *vette*. This means 'supernatural being', or 'creature'.

Its physical presence is in flux. Its Wealden coastline is in a process of continuous, sagging decay, yet its land mass almost doubles in size every day when the tide goes out. A layer of gault clay, known locally as 'Blue Slipper' for self-evident reasons, is the source of the geological instability, and it's as if the whole landmass sits on a layer of grease. As recently as 1928, large sections of cliff and houses would simply slide into the sea overnight.[9]

Its very substance has dressed churches. A vein of fine white Bembridge limestone, now exhausted, was used by the Normans to finish Winchester Cathedral. Its stone formed the altars of many Hampshire churches, including my old friend Hinton Ampner, manorial church to the house that was haunted to death (see **FT309:28-33, 312:68, 336:74, 342:73**). Its habitation is indescribably ancient: quite possibly, in the Solent Valley, now beneath the waves, the first part of England to be inhabited by man. Amongst the crocodile coprolites of the northwest coast lies evidence of a Mesolithic hunting platform [10] in the drowned valley, and signs of grain harvesting that have recently revolutionised our understanding of European farming.

It's a fortean place: of that there is no question. In the Eighties I used to pour lunchtime pints for the Council employee investigating the elusive 'Isle of Wight Puma'. From Sir Richard Worsley's *A History of the Isle of Wight*, published in 1781, we get accounts of ball lightning in Godshill Church actually entering the church and wrecking the mechanism of the steeple clock. A legend about this church, almost certainly built on a pagan site, involves its stones being moved by supernatural forces overnight as the people tried to build it.

And there have been witches. Joan Atwoode, John Myghel and Agnes Raynold, all from Newport, were accused of witchcraft, incantation and the magic arts in the 1520s. A few years later, Agnes Porter was accused by the Lord of the Manor at Ashey of practising witchcraft, and had all her property sequestered. Innes claimed that the Wicca-meister Gerald Gardner (see pp56-57 this issue) learned his craft from an Island Witch; I'm not sure about that.

There's still supposed to be a strong pagan and Wiccan presence on the island, though I have no knowledge of it myself. The druids have claimed the Longstone,[11] even though its 6,000-year-old origins long predate the ordinances of that priesthood. From the Longstone you get a sense of the ancient and archaic landscape of the West Wight, and the sandy hill below the S-shaped, serpentine colloquy of chalk downlands across which I'd shortly be setting out after finishing my cup of tea on the beach of St Helens, with its ruined church slowly falling into the sea.

THE PHANTOM CITY

It had been a pleasant encounter. Andrew fell back into his holiday. I started the journey back to my parents. I road my motorbike over Ashey and then Mersley Downs, as it happens, tracing a story with which Innes begins his article in *The Unexplained*.

At 6.30 on the night of 4 January 1967, it was a full Moon, known in the old almanacs as 'The Moon after Yule'. Dr White and his wife Sheila set out from their St Helens home to drive across the spine of the Isle of Wight to Niton at its southern point. They rounded Ashey Down and began the descent down the hill, Knighton Gorges a few yards to the left as they passed the bottom of the decline – but more of that later.

Then they saw something astonishing. Instead of the usual dark fields there were thousands of twinkling lights. They could have been looking down at a city. They stopped the car and got out to look. Ahead they could see the small country lane that leads right to Havenstreet, but it wasn't a country lane that night: it appeared to be a city street with buildings either side. They got back in the car and cautiously resumed a drive straight towards it. Yet as they approached, suddenly the whole image flickered and went away. The clouds suddenly seemed like black mountains in the sky, and the serene Moon sinister.

Mrs White, talking to the authors Gay Baldwin & Ray Anker in *Ghosts of the Isle of Wight*, was keen to emphasise her own reliability: "My husband, as a doctor, was a far from credulous person. He was furious we couldn't explain it". Dr White had told her: "I'm glad you saw that too – I thought I was going mad".

She remembers a strange feeling as the

STEVE SPELLER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: The 6,000-year-old Longstone gives a sense of the ancient archaic landscape of the West Wight.

ABOVE: The Hare and Hounds on Downend Road, near where Mr and Mrs White experienced their timeslip. **BELOW:** They described the episode to Gay Steedman and Ray Anker for their classic book of island ghostlore.

bright-lit scene suddenly vanished and the countryside returned to normal. Everything felt quite threatening. "A great depression came on me – I wanted to burst into tears".

But the experience was not over yet. Driving another mile or so they approached a famous pub at a junction called The Hare and Hounds. As they drove towards it they began to see hundreds of bobbing lights, and in front of them "a carpet of light was unrolled towards Newport". Everywhere there were figures figures brandishing torches. Mrs White remembers one individual in particular – an unusually tall man wearing a long jerkin and a wide leather belt. He had a handsome profile. "He literally ran through the bonnet of our car – right through it".

They went into The Hare and Hounds for a stiff drink. They don't mention it in their account, but on the road outside, Michael Morey, a murderer, is supposed to walk with his head severed and hanging by a strip of skin. The children used to sing in Isle of Wight schools:

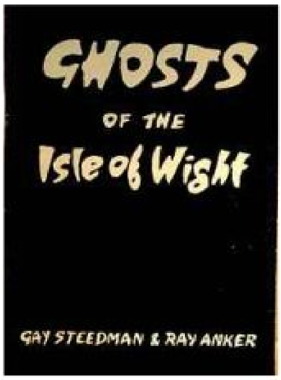
Michael Morey's dead
For chopping off his grandson's head
And now he's hung on Arreton Down
For rooks and ravens to peck down

As a footnote to this incident, in his book on the subject of the 1736 murder,[12] Kenneth S Phillips describes how during a Turnpike Commission excavation of this Bronze Age barrow in 1815, more or less at the point where Dr and Mrs White claimed they saw the tall warrior charge through their car, a 6ft tall skeleton was found. "Under his back was an iron knife".

When Gay Baldwin interviewed Mrs White years later, in Bembridge, where she lived, she was dismissive of any attempts to explain away what had been seen that dark January evening. A farmer's barbecue? Nonsense. Glowworms? Also rubbish.

It's perhaps worth mentioning that many years later, in the area of Robin Hill where the Whites saw their past-future vision, sprang up the Bestival, now held annually, with lights and crowds, every summer since 2004.

According to Peter Underwood, Sheila White stuck by her story, as in 1983 he mentions a correspondence with her and an article she had written in *The Hampshire Magazine* - which I have been unable to locate.



GHOSTS
OF THE
Isle of Wight

GAY STEEDMAN & RAY ANKER

KNIGHTON GORGES

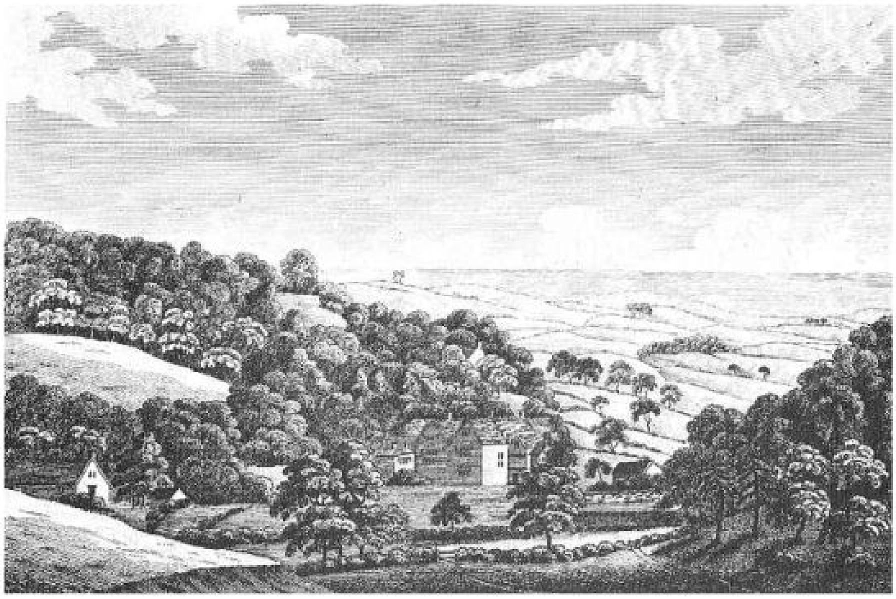
At more or less the point where the Whites first saw their vision there's a turning to the left to Newchurch, which, as it happens, is the site of one of the most persistent time-slip stories on the island. Going down this ancient road, you emerge from a kind of tunnel to see a grand pair of gateposts with no grand house behind them. You have arrived at Knighton Gorges, one of the oldest and most beautiful demolished houses on the Isle of Wight, which returns, it is said, as an apparition every New Year's Eve: lights are seen and the sound of music heard, till the sound of a gunshot and baying dogs brings the theatre to a close.

Legend maintains that its owner, one Captain Bisset, had the whole house demolished when a daughter disobeyed him and married against his wishes. On his deathbed, riddled with syphilis, he had his great bedstead moved to a gardener's cottage and called in the delapidators.

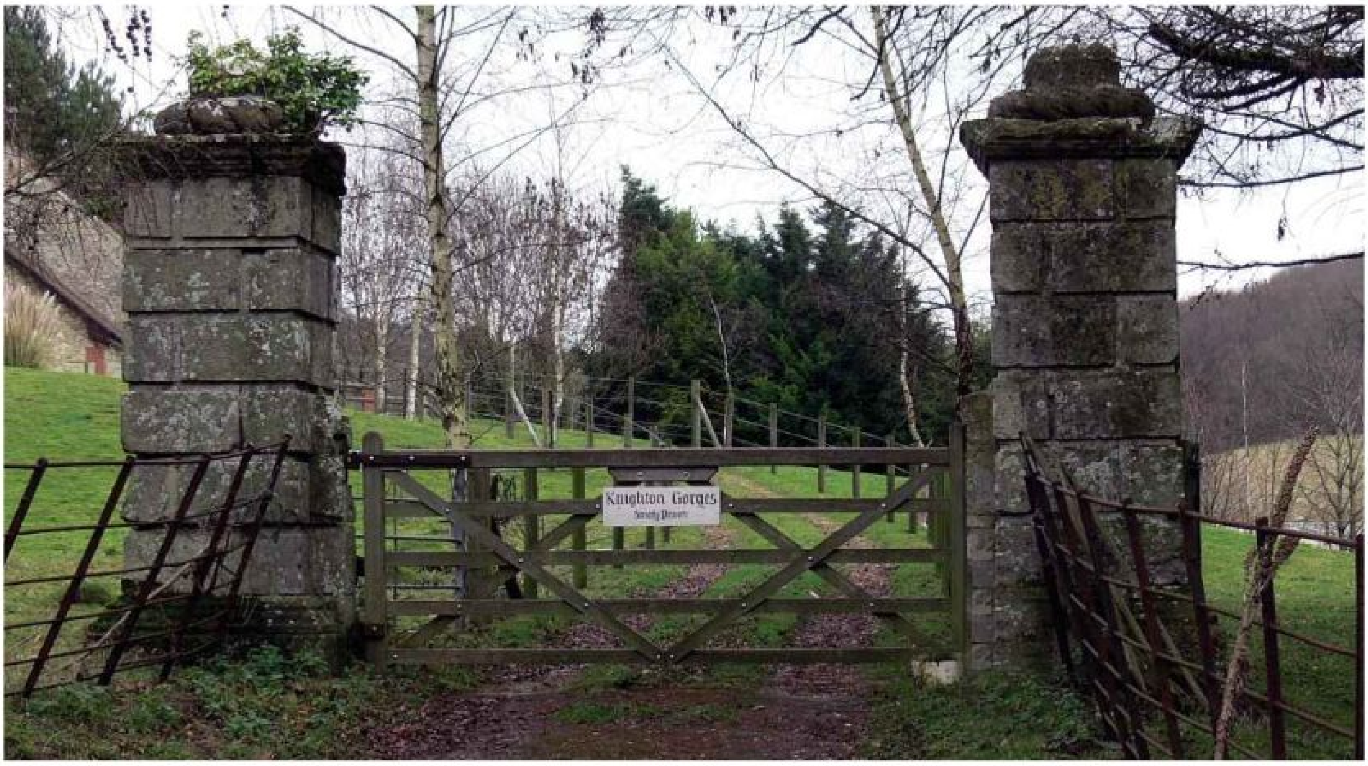
In reality, Bisset died in 1821 at Lessundrum Castle in Huntley, Scotland, and almost certainly had Knighton Gorges demolished after a fire or subsidence – most likely in 1815 when he contributed a sundial, which had formerly been on the lawn of the house, to Newchurch's church.

It pleases me that this sundial reads – you can still see it inside the church after persistent vandalism necessitated the move – *Ventura est nox qua non potest operari* ('Night is coming, when I no longer work').

Despite that sundial, Knighton works very well at night. It has a dark history, its reputation established by one of its original owners, a murderer of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. Its De Gorges owners had Templar links. It sits beside a substantial natural spring, later used for victualling the Spithead fleet, and famous for staying drinkable till the Cape. It's long gone now, but for many centuries there was a pool beside the house as well; we do not know how old, but if it was ever part of a natural formation it would have had considerable sacred significance. We now know that our ancestors considered such pools to be doorways into other realms. I suspect the same can be said of the one at Gatcombe, which is why Gatcombe



ABOVE: An old print of Knighton Gorges, site of one of the most persistant timeslip stories on the Isle of Wight.



NATURENET

ABOVE: The gateposts of Knighton Gorges. The house is long gone, though said to reappear each New Year's Eve. **BELOW:** Another tale concerns the stone animals that are supposed to sometimes appear on the gateposts before vanishing again; this example is from another house in the area, perhaps the source of the belief.

Church is dedicated to St Olave,[13] one of the greatest ever destroyers of pagan sites.

Knighton was always an important island house, almost certainly used by pre-Norman aristocracy, and its fortified tower contained a famously haunted room known as 'The Room of Tears'. The priests who attended a chantry in its grounds died successively of the Black Death. One of its later owners, Sir Tristram Dillington, killed himself, not from grief as legend has it, but from losing his Newport house in a card-game; his butler covered up this 'felo de se', which would have meant his entire estate going to the Crown, by turning out his well-bred horse 'Thunderbolt' into the pond with a broken girth to simulate a riding accident. Dillington's sister's rewarded their faithful servant with the gift of a farm near Brading.

Another interesting story connected to Knighton Gorges – which I would visit obsessively in my teenage years, almost willing the building to appear, once falling asleep on the site of the house and dreaming of windows opening and closing by themselves – concerns the presence of a girl who can only be described as a Baptist saint.

The Dairyman's Daughter written by the clergyman Legh Richmond is one of the world's first bestsellers – it's been claimed that it has sold over 10 million copies since its original publication. It's the cloying tale of a little girl too good to live, and a model for several famous Dickens characters. On page 10 of my edition, Richmond first meets this saintly peasant Elizabeth Wallbridge in the parlour of Knighton Gorges, where she works as a servant.

It's a curious coincidence that the house caught fire a year after the book's publication in 1814; I've always wondered whether a votary of Elizabeth Wallbridge threw the match. I don't think Richmond cared for the Bissets, and it shows. The clergyman's subsequent meditation after he leaves the house, on top of Ashey Down looking down on Arreton valley (and the hillside opposite where the Whites saw their Solent City), is a masterful exercise in self-congratulating piety, and also, by the way, mentions the very ancient and famous holly tree in the distance dominating Queen Bower, a tree which I've always suspected had pre-Christian significance.

GRAHAM HORN

FOLKLORE AND FICTION

The most interesting thing about Knighton Gorges is that it's what I'd classify as an active folkloric haunt. People turn up on New Year's Eve, hoping to see the house appear. In her book on the subject, *The Ghosts of Knighton Gorges*, Gay Baldwin records an impressive number of people who've had experiences at the location; electrical failure in cars seems common, and the most famous story concerns appearing and disappearing stone animals on the gateposts. The outline of the house sometimes appears, as if it's caught in some kind of dimensional crisis, or holographic reality is glitching.

The first real record of the house re-appearing appears in the work of Ethel Hargrove after two visits to the location, most notably in 1915. However, the house she describes bears no resemblance to the house we know was there through engravings and archival records, and the party she describes as being in full swing appears to be on the ground floor, going against the detail that the main drawing room was on the first floor. But, no matter. As I discuss in my book *A Natural History of Ghosts*, this was the era of timeslips, when the idea became fashionable for about 20 years, from the Ghosts of Versailles to the Angels of Mons. There's a sense of Romantic crisis about the timeslip. It's a form of late-flowering Gothic.

Gay Baldwin confirmed in a phone call that the other great timeslip story in the *Unexplained* piece on the Isle of Wight, which Innes dwells on at length, is an entire fabrication by the vicar James Evans, who claimed to have heard it from a fellow clergyman who had seen an old manuscript. It's a shame. It's a great story. It hasn't really been acknowledged before, but the Isle of Wight's folkloric landscape has been affected by a whole series of effective yarn-spinners beginning with Abraham Elder's *Tales and Legends of the Isle of Wight* in 1843. I've seen his tall stories pop up in countless secondary sources.

But Evans confessed the fabrication to Baldwin. It went like this. In 1831, a girl named Lucy Lightfoot, who had fallen obsessively in love with the wooden effigy of a crusader in Gatcombe Church (which incidentally almost certainly comes from Knighton Gorges, and does exist) disappeared during a terrible electrical storm. She then suddenly appeared in the records as the consort of the very same knight – she had gone back

STEVE SPELLER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: "On the brow of Five Barrows, you feel that something very ancient once went to sleep here, and slumbers still."

in time *to be with him*. Looking back at the *Unexplained* text now, one senses that Innes knew in his heart of hearts that this was in the formal sense a fiction: "It must be said that extensive research has not so far recovered the manuscript said to have been found by the Revd. Trelawney".

The West Wight too has its timeslips. There are two ghost-pubs, where visitors buy a drink, get change in old money, and then can never find the pub again. Some supposed apparitions, like the 'hanged boy' of Gurnard, were used to cover 18th century smuggling activities; but was the hanged man seen by a little girl in 1928 at the Dodpits crossroads at Dark Lane (it really is called Dark Lane) a timeslip or a residual/stone-tape ghost? The mood that accompanied it – which seems a key aspect of the timeslip experience – as well as little details, like the hanged man's single boot on the ground below, seem to indicate a timeslip. There's another story of a man in Wootton, not far from Quarr, waking up to find his room had transformed to one he assumed had existed 100 years earlier.

Billingham has rather faded from its 'most haunted house in the island' status of the 1970s, surrendering that crown to Arreton and Appuldercombe after some TV shows said so. But it's Billingham for me. Very haunted gardens. Men fighting a duel over a girl whose face has now fallen from her skull. Men who shouldn't be there. Stone-tape rapier clashes. I shuddered at the story of the child who came into the house from the garden and told his parents: "I don't like that old lady peeping at me from the dovecote". In 1962, a gardener asked the owner why he was "wearing those funny clothes round the garden".

Priestley experienced little or nothing there. Shane Leslie made a lot of stuff up. But later owners felt the house shaking, as ghosts and geology morphed into a perfect synergy, where bedside clocks would mysteriously lose an hour. Medium Margo Williams, who gave me advice on my ghost-hunt to Sawston Hall, visited in 1978; not only did the ghost 'Francis' rather fancy her, she found herself transported instantly to the attic, like a latter-day Mrs Guppy.

In *The Day of the Triffids* the island embraces its apocalyptic destiny; our noble survivors retreat to the Isle of Wight and slowly clear it of triffids, much as centuries earlier the place was completely cleared of foxes. It's a clinging point between worlds. From John Wyndham's description I believe he must have placed his survivors' redoubt at Appuldercombe House, haunted by a monk, and an 18th-century sex scandal. It's the place where Sir Richard Worsley wrote his *History of the Isle of Wight*.

I grew up in a couple of haunted Isle of Wight houses myself, and never saw anything, but like Brian Innes I believe there is something very special and very strange about the Isle of Wight. I live in Shoreditch now, which couldn't be more different. I still recall my adolescence growing up by the barrow of the last pagan king of England, secluded in modern woodland, dreaming of nature spirits and ghosts and the pendulum of time. Sometimes, mainly in the winter months, when the noise of the holidaymakers has gone, on the brow of Five Barrows or St Catherine's, you feel that something very ancient once went to sleep here, and slumbers still.

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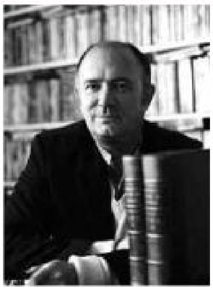

ROGER CLARKE is a former writer and film critic at the *Independent*. His book *A Natural History of Ghosts* (2012) is widely available from Penguin. It has been published in Germany and Spain and is due out shortly in Japan.

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12 Kenneth S Phillips, *For Rooks and Ravens: the Execution of Michael Morey of Arreton in 1737*, Isle of Wight County Council, 1981.

13 "The Norse gods were no match for him, either because they were devils and subject to Christ, or because they had never existed in the first place. He threw down the idols, had their worshippers either killed or baptized, and that was that". www.roman-catholic-saints.com/olav.html

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A SUMMER OF MONSTERS

In the Summer of 1816, as skies darkened across the world following a volcanic eruption, a group of Romantic writers gathered in a house on the shores of Lake Geneva and told one another ghost stories. **MARIA J PÉREZ CUERVO** looks back at the tangle of personal relationships and psychosexual nightmares that gave birth to some enduring fictional horrors...

Two hundred years ago, darkness descended upon Europe. Summer became a season of gloom: crops withered, birds remained silent, heavy rains fell incessantly, and candles had to be lit at midday, as though it were the depths of winter. Earlier in the year, dark spots had appeared on the Sun, and scientists wondered if they were the cause of the calamity. The strange, almost supernatural, atmosphere of doom was captured by Lord Byron in his apocalyptic poem *Darkness*, dating from the same year:

> *"Morn came and went – and came, and brought no day,*
> *And men forgot their passions in the dread*
> *Of this their desolation; and all hearts*
> *Were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light."*

It would be more than a century before anyone found an explanation: the massive eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia had triggered a wave of extreme weather, a global "volcanic winter" – thus 1816 passed into the annals of history as "The Year Without a Summer".

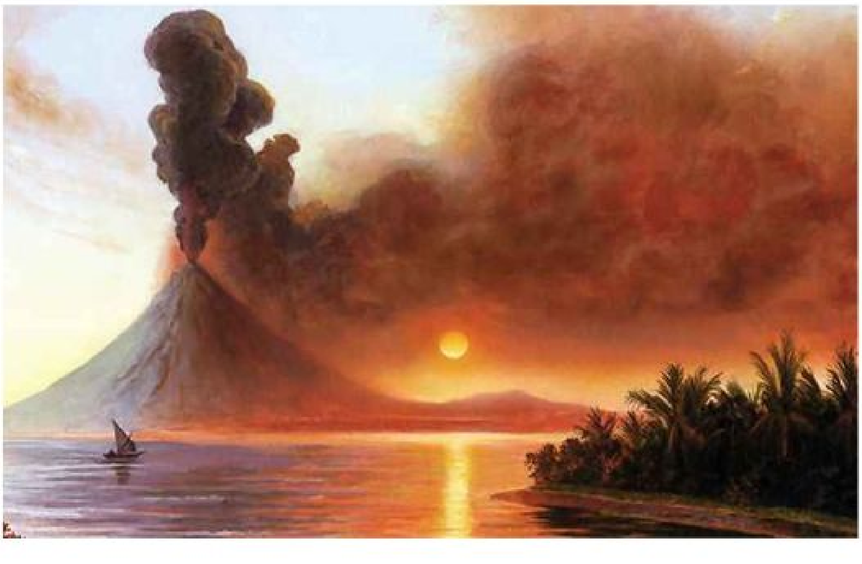
This was the summer in which Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, her soon-to-be husband Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, John William Polidori and Claire Clairmont met at Villa Diodati, on the shores of Lake Geneva in Switzerland. The unseasonably cold and damp weather forced them to stay indoors and incited Byron to pronounce his legendary words: "We will each write a ghost story". On the night of 16 June, a violent storm sowed the seed of creativity, producing two monsters that would prove pivotal to the horror genre: the creature of Frankenstein and the vampire. The gathering still echoes in popular culture as the epitome of the Gothic, not only for the fictional creatures it gave birth to, but also for the harrowing events that followed like a curse.

JOURNEY TO ITALY

In 1814, two years before they all met, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin chose to face ostracism when she began a romance with one of her father's political followers, the poet Percy Shelley. Although married, he claimed to be a believer in free love and promptly abandoned his wife and two children to elope with Mary, then 16. The new couple, along with Mary's stepsister Claire Clairmont, travelled around Europe and returned home before leaving again, this time with their child William. They might never have gone to Switzerland had it not been for Claire's infatuation with Lord Byron: the 18-year-old had started an affair with the infamous poet, 10 years her senior, while he was still living in England, and somehow managed to convince her friends to move, at least temporarily, close to him.

Byron's reasons for fleeing England weren't that dissimilar to those of Mary and Percy's: cornered by debt and tangled in a web of scandals (the break-up of his marriage to Annabella Millbanke, the continuous rumours of incest, sodomy, and madness), he was probably trying to find a space away from the constraints of his native country – and he had employed a physician, the literarily-inclined 20-year-old Polidori, to accompany him.

Polidori's diary, which he kept after Byron's publisher offered him 500 pounds,



LEFT: A painting showing the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia, cause of 1816's 'Year Without a Summer'. **OPPOSITE:** The Villa Diodati today.

ROBERT GRASSI / CREATIVE COMMONS

contains a succinct reference to the first encounter of the group: "Getting out [of a boat] LB met M Wollstonecraft Godwin, her sister, and Percy Shelley". Shortly afterwards, they "Dined. P.S, the author of *Queen Mab* came: consumptive, twenty-six, separated from his wife."[1]

Initially, the group stayed in the suitably named Hotel Angleterre, but in early June, Byron and Polidori moved to Villa Belle Rive[2] (which was to be renamed Villa Diodati by Byron, after its owners) and the Shelleys to the nearby Maison Chapuis. Since Rousseau, Voltaire, Milton and Gibbon had also lived on the shores of Lake Geneva, the place had an aura of intellectual sacredness, which, along with the liberal political climate of the country, pleased the young poets.

Byron's biographer Thomas Moore writes about his routine, as described by Mary: "A late breakfast, then a visit to the Shelleys' cottage and an excursion on the Lake, – at five, dinner (when he usually preferred being alone), and then, if weather permitted, an excursion again". Byron and Shelley would often sail together if the weather wasn't abysmal, "an occurrence not unfrequent".

ON THE NIGHT OF 16 JUNE, A VIOLENT STORM SOWED THE SEEDS OF CREATIVITY

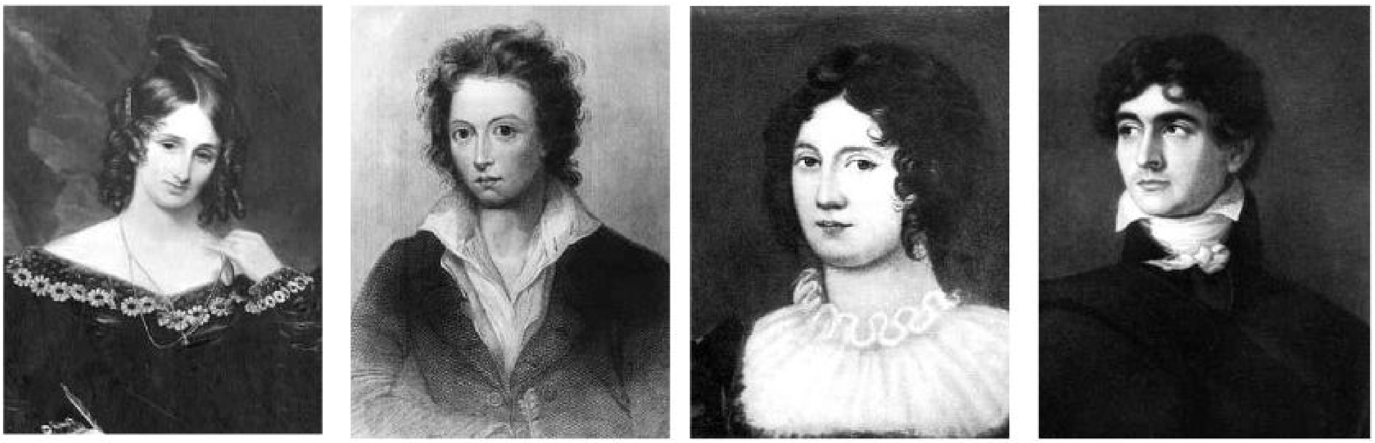
FRIENDS AND FOES

Although away from their homeland, the group couldn't entirely escape gossip: the owner of the Hotel Angleterre rented telescopes pointing at Villa Diodati to his international guests, who whispered stories of orgies, incest and unspeakable acts – all suggested, apparently, by Byron's notorious reputation and a series of petticoats (probably just tablecloths) hanging from his balcony.

Byron was at the centre of most of the conflicts within the group. His relationship with Polidori was far from smooth: the dynamics were set from the very beginning, when they were waiting to sail to the continent from Dover. The physician had asked him to read a play he'd written and Byron mocked it mercilessly in front of a rowdy group of friends, to which Polidori responded by storming off. Although in a letter to his sister Polidori wrote "I am with him on the footing of an equal", Byron continued to mock him during their trip, largely due to the doctor's unfortunate susceptibility to travel sickness. Once, when they were by the Rhine, the physician asked the poet: "Pray, what is there excepting writing that I cannot do better than you?" Byron answered: "First... I can hit with a pistol the keyhole of that door – Secondly, I can swim across that river to yonder point – and thirdly, I can give you a damned good thrashing."

Polidori, ambitious and hotheaded, seemed fixated with proving his literary merits by association with Byron and Shelley. Unfortunately, Byron wasn't at all interested in mentoring him. Constantly humiliated, feeling "like a star in the halo of the moon, invisible" in Byron's company, he was never accepted as an equal, nicknamed "Polly Dolly" by the poet. And, although his diary suggests a closer relationship with Mary, in her letters she referred to him as "Poor Polidori".

Claire Clairmont received similar



PICTURES: HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The assembled guests: (l-r) Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, Claire Clairmont and John Polidori. **BELOW:** Byron pictured on the verandah of Villa Diodati, Lake Geneva beyond.

contemptuous treatment from Byron. She was determined to conquer him, in spite of his continued rebuffs: he refused to see her in private and only spent time with her when the Shelleys were also present. His apparent scorn didn't prevent them from becoming lovers again – the poet justified himself by saying "a man is a man, and if a girl of eighteen comes prancing to you at all hours there is but one way."

Shelley and Byron became close friends during the summer. But the former had struggled all his life with health problems and a nervous disposition: prone to sleepwalking and waking dreams, he was addicted to laudanum, which he took to "dampen his nerves", and for what he considered its virtues – he claimed it expanded his mind, altering his state of thinking and allowing him to question societal norms. Although it might have catalysed his creativity, it also made him suffer from hallucinations, triggering bodily spasms and strange, feverish dreams, blurring the line between reality and fantasy. One of his most recurring terrors, a common motif in his works, was connected to the "divided self" – an "anti-type" hidden within "the obscure parts of my own nature", his doppelgänger. In *Oh! There are spirits of the air*, he wrote: "this fiend, whose ghastly presence ever / beside thee like thy shadow hangs."

LAUDANUM MADE HIM SUFFER FROM HALLUCINATIONS, BODILY SPASMS AND FEVERISH DREAMS

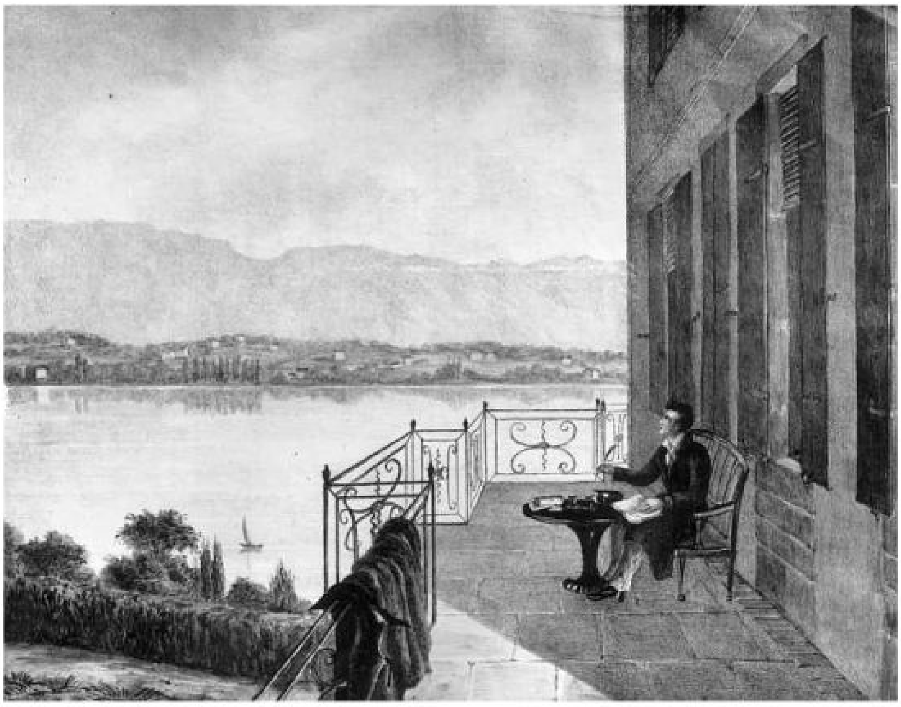
In spite of her youth, Mary struggled with some harrowing memories. In 1815, when she wasn't yet 17, she had lost their firstborn, a two-month premature baby girl. In a letter to her friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg, she wrote: "My baby is dead… I awoke in the night to give it suck. It appeared to be sleeping so quietly that I would not awake it. It was dead then, but we did not find that out till morning – from its appearance it evidently died of convulsions… Shelley is afraid of a fever from the milk – for I am no longer a mother now." Her diary reveals that she was tormented by the experience: "Dream that my little baby came to life again, that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived – I awake and find no baby". To this, she had to add her mother's death, due to infected placental residue, 10 days after her own birth. The pain derived from these memories, the horrifying visions of a monstrous birth, fed the creative energy behind *Frankenstein*.

A HIDEOUS PROGENY

One evening between 10 and 13 June, a storm broke as the group was in Villa Diodati. The ghastly weather forced the Shelleys and Clairmont to spend the night at the house with Byron and Polidori, and they all entertained themselves by reading ghost stories. The atmosphere was bewitching, and Byron resolved: "We will each write a ghost story".

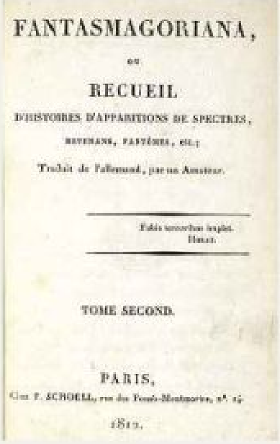
Mary recalls that Byron "began a tale, a fragment of which he printed at the end of his poem of Mazeppa", Shelley "commenced one founded on the experiences of his early life", and "poor Polidori had some terrible idea about a skull-headed lady." She tried to think of a story that would "curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart," but the muse wouldn't strike.

Soon afterwards, Mary witnessed a conversation between Byron and Shelley, which she recounted in her 1831 prologue to *Frankenstein*: "They talked of the experiments of Dr Darwin… who preserved a piece of vermicelli [sic] in a glass case, till by some extraordinary means it began to move with voluntary motion… Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated." On 16 June, she woke up in the middle of the night after having suffered a vivid nightmare: "I saw – with shut eyes, but acute mental vision – I saw the pale student of the unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine show signs of life and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion… His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away… hope… that this



RISCHGITZ / GETTY IMAGES

DARK VISIONS: INSPIRATIONS BEHIND THE MONSTERS



FANTASMAGORIANA,

OU

RECUEIL

D'HISTOIRES D'APPARITIONS DE SPECTRES,

REVENANS, FANTÔMES, etc.;

Traduit de l'allemand, par un Amateur.

TOME SECOND.

PARIS,

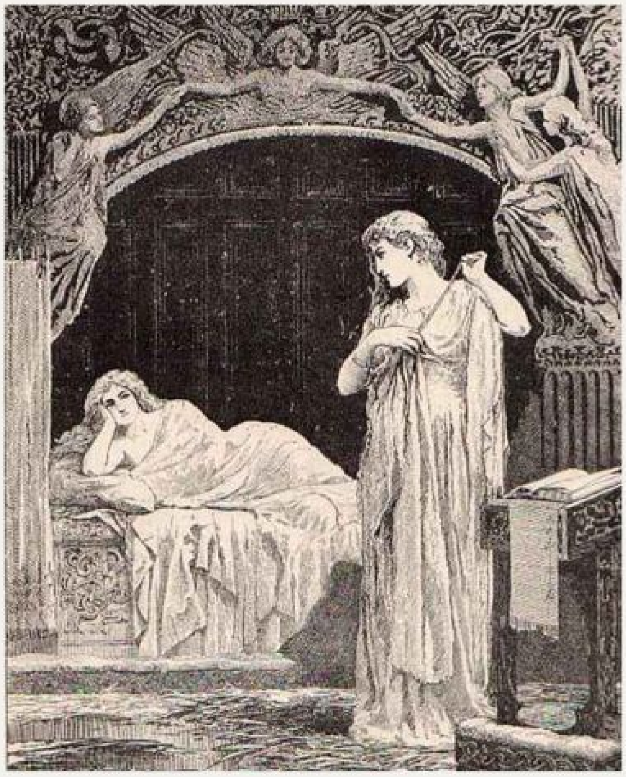
Chez F. SCHOELL, rue des Fossés-Montmartre, n°. 14.

1812.

Fantasmagoriana

The night on which Byron set the writing challenge, the group had been reading aloud a collection of German ghost stories, translated into French and published in 1812 under the name *Fantasmagoriana: An anthology of stories of apparitions of spectres, revenants, phantoms, etc., translated from the German by an amateur.* The title was a reference to the phantasmagoria shows of Étienne-Gaspard Robert, who in the late 1790s had started to use projections, ventriloquism, and other effects to shock the public (**see FT*****). Most stories were written by Johann August Ael and Friedrich Laun. Mary Shelley recalled some of them as an inspiration for *Frankenstein*: "History of the Inconstant Lover" is the tale of a man who finds himself in the arms of the ghost of his former bride, whom he had deserted to marry another. In "The Family Portraits", a man's ghost, dressed in armour, must bestow the kiss of death on all the younger sons of his family.

Christabel



One midnight, some days later, Lord Byron read, in "such a voice as the devil tempted Eve with" (in Amelia Opie's words), some verses of Coleridge's 1816 poem *Christabel*. It was the passage in which Geraldine, a lamia – a serpent-demon who has taken the appearance of a woman, and who, according to Greek mythology, devours children – seeks to possess Christabel. In Polidori's words, "silence ensued, and Shelley, suddenly shrieking and putting his hands to his head, ran out of the room with a candle". The physician had written his thesis on somnambulism, and was familiar with trance states, so he knew how to take care of the situation. He splashed Shelley's face with water and gave him ether. It took some time for Shelley to recover, affected as he was by Byron's reading, the eerie atmosphere, and, quite possibly, the laudanum. The combination of these provoked a mental vision of "a woman he heard of who had eyes instead of nipples" that he projected on Mary; a vision that, Polidori wrote, "taking hold of his mind, horrified him".

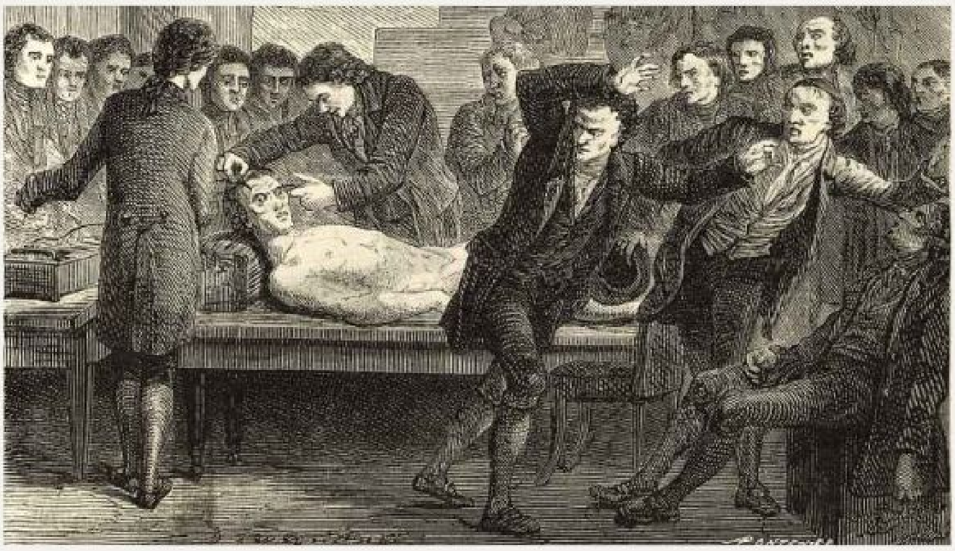
Galvanism

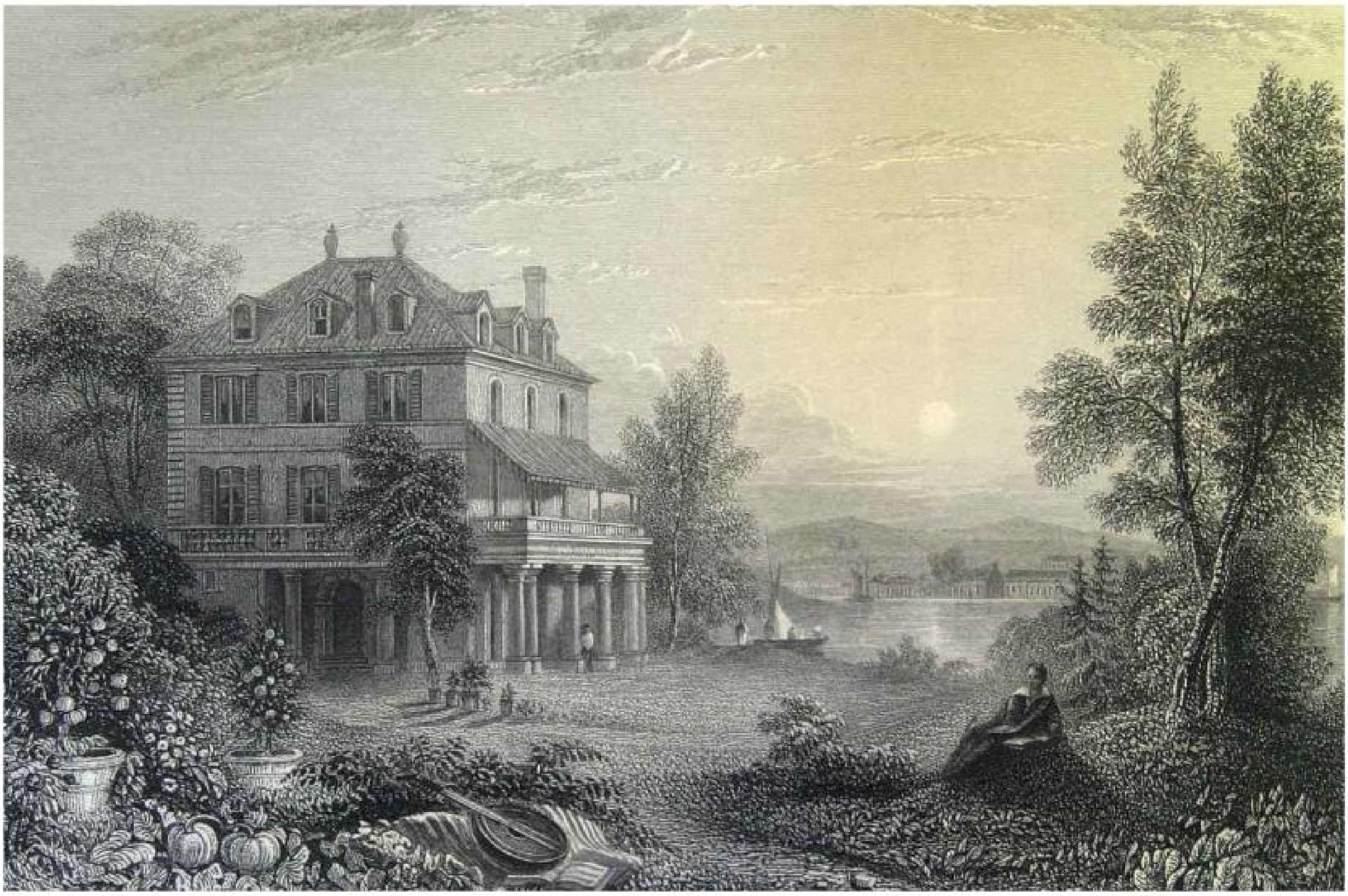
In the late 18th century, Luigi Galvani accidentally discovered that frog legs twitched when they were stimulated by a spark of electricity. In 1803, his nephew, Giovanni Aldini, attempted to reanimate an executed criminal in Newgate, London, using the same principles. The *Newgate Calendar* records that the eyelid, the right hand and the legs of the corpse did, in fact, twitch.

At the time, the line between life and death was being debated in scientific circles, sparking fears of being buried alive and causing people to doubt their preconceptions of death. James Curry, one of the Shelleys' doctors, wrote about the distinctions between "absolute" and "apparent" death, and argued that absolute death could only be verified when putrefaction started.

Meanwhile, the Royal Humane Society aimed to educate people on how to resuscitate the drowned and suffocated. In 1795, Mary Wollstonecraft attempted suicide by plunging into the Thames, but was rescued by watermen and successfully revived in a receiving station of the Royal Humane Society. She would later complain in a letter that she had been "inhumanly brought back to life and misery".

Mouth-to-mouth techniques, warmth, and friction were also used to bring stillborn infants back to life at London's Lying-In Hospital. Perhaps Mary's dream of resuscitating her daughter by rubbing her in front of the fire was a projection of this.



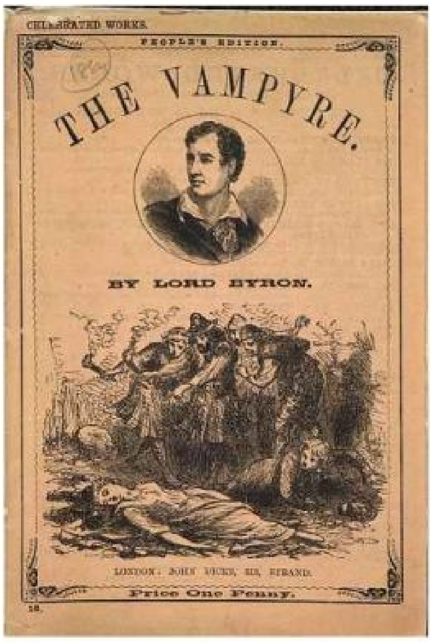


ABOVE: A Romantic vision of Byron in the gardens of the Villa Deodati. **BELOW:** Polidori's *The Vampyre* was attributed to Byron for decades, as in this edition of 1884.

thing… would subside into dead matter." The next morning she began writing: "It was on a dreary night in November." *Frankenstein*, her "hideous progeny", the monster who lurches from the 19th to the 21st century and still fascinates us, had been born.

Polidori had also started work on "The Vampyre", loosely inspired by Byron's "A fragment". The physician's work, which lay abandoned for years, was constructed as an allegory of his relationship with the poet, a projection of his resentment after the humiliations he had endured. In his tale, the vampire isn't merely a feral creature of deep dark European folklore, but becomes a contemporary aristocrat, magnetic and attractive, and, as such, worshipped by a society that praises celebrity at any price, even if it means abusing the innocent and noble to exalt the cruel and ruthless.

Years later, in 1819, Polidori was still struggling to succeed as a writer when Henry Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine* published *The Vampyre: A Tale by Lord Byron* – his own story, attributed to his rival. It was an instant success. When Polidori tried to assert his authorship, he wasn't taken seriously: people accused him of plagiarism, or, at best, of jealousy. His attempts to publish his own edition were thwarted. Byron stated his lack of involvement with it: "If the book is clever, it would be base to deprive the real writer, whoever he may be, of the honours, and if stupid, I desire the responsibility of nobody's dullness but my own… I have, besides, a personal dislike to *vampires*". The public, however, preferred to believe that such a sensational story was the work of the scandalous poet, and not that of an obscure physician, a foreigner, a nobody. Its true author received no payment for it, and no glory.



CELEBRATED WORKS.

PEOPLE'S EDITION.

THE VAMPYRE.

BY LORD BYRON.

LONDON: JOHN DICKS, 313, STRAND.

Price One Penny.

18.

HAUNTED BY A CURSE

After the summer of 1816 the Shelleys returned to London, with Claire carrying Byron's child. Later, Mary would refer to the "happy days" of that "wet, ungenial summer" in a nostalgic manner. From then on, tragedy preyed on their lives at a staggering pace, as if the monsters they had created hunted and tormented them till the end.

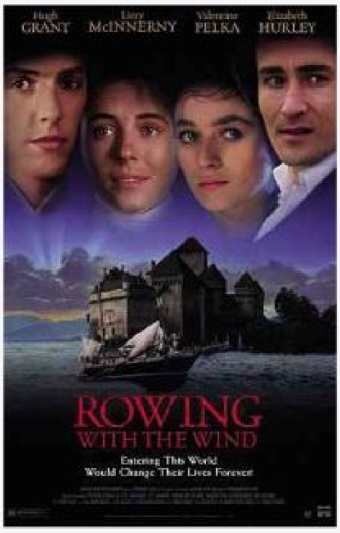
The first death struck in October 1816, when Mary's half-sister, Fanny Imlay, committed suicide by taking a fatal dose of laudanum. Some biographers suggest that the cause might have been her unrequited love for Shelley – it is at least curious that he wrote about their last encounter in this manner: *"Her voice did quiver as we parted, yet knew I not that heart was broken."*

Two months later, Harriet, Percy's estranged wife, was found dead, floating in the Serpentine, in an advanced state of pregnancy. There were rumours that she'd taken a lover, although some biographers have raised the possibility that Percy was the father of the unborn child, based on a previous encounter they had in London. In her suicide letter, Harriet wrote some words for her husband: "If you had never left me I might have lived". Shelley married Mary, perhaps trying to project an air of respectability, and applied for custody of his two children with Harriet. But, when questioned by the court, he denounced the institution of marriage, and custody was denied.

On 11 March 1818, the day on which *Frankenstein* was published anonymously in England, the Shelleys and their children,

REEL GOTHIC: THE SUMMER OF 1816 ON FILM

HAUNTED SUMMER



THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (JAMES WHALE, 1935)

The prologue to the Universal classic contains a scene inspired by the gathering in Villa Diodati, with Elsa Lanchester (The Bride) portraying Mary Shelley. She is joined by Percy and Byron, but the depiction of the three is almost ridiculously respectable, and fails to capture the tragedy that lurked underneath.

GOTHIC (KEN RUSSELL, 1986)

An excessive, surreal and grotesque romp loosely inspired by the events, as one would expect from Ken Russell. It contains some interesting visual moments, such as a tribute to Fuseli's "Nightmare" – which was, in fact, one of Byron's favourite paintings – and the scene inspired by Coleridge's *Christabel*, with a woman with eyes instead of nipples.

HAUNTED SUMMER (IVAN PASSER, 1988)

A fictionalisation with a light and gentle tone that takes place over the course of the summer in Lake Geneva. In spite of his terrible British accent, this Byron is notably more charming and forgivable than the others. His relationship with Mary follows the classical pattern of a Gothic Romance, where the heroine, attracted by his darkness, must redeem him from his sins. The opium episode plays, again, with the imagery of Fuseli, and suggests that Mary created the monster to provoke a response in Byron.

ROWING WITH THE WIND (GONZALO SUÁREZ, 1988)

The best film about the summer of 1816 and the events that followed was partly shot on the misty coast of Asturias, in Northern Spain, with British actors, and became a cult classic in its country of origin. Its sympathies are clearly with Polidori and Mary Shelley, who appear human and vulnerable next to a spoilt, self-entitled Byron and a wide-eyed and slightly deranged Shelley. Poetic and relatively faithful to the real events, in spite of its historical inaccuracies, the most notable of which is that Polidori's suicide is placed in Villa Diodati for dramatic effect. The appearances of the Creature as a harbinger of death, to a soundtrack of Vaughan Williams, evoke all the angst and tragedy in their lives.

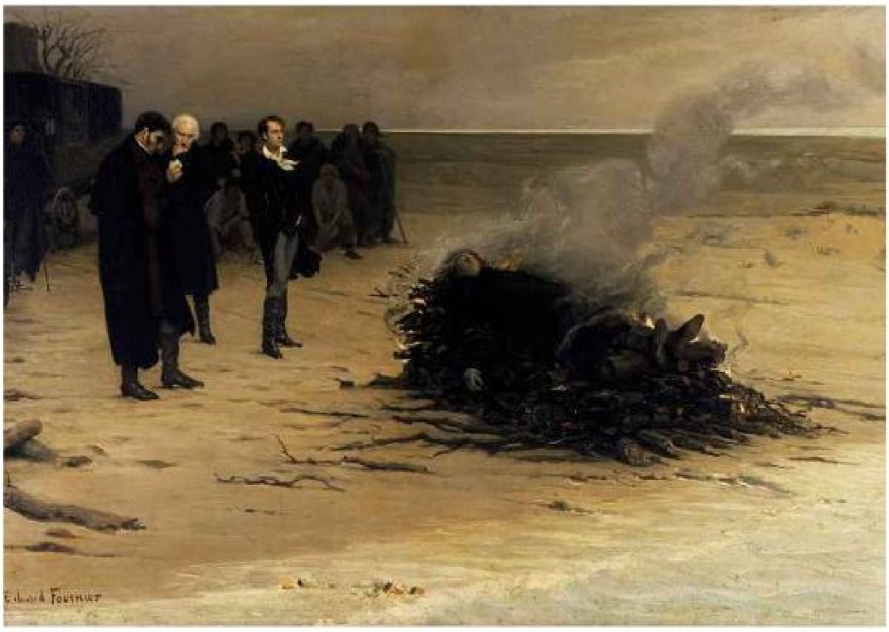
THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN

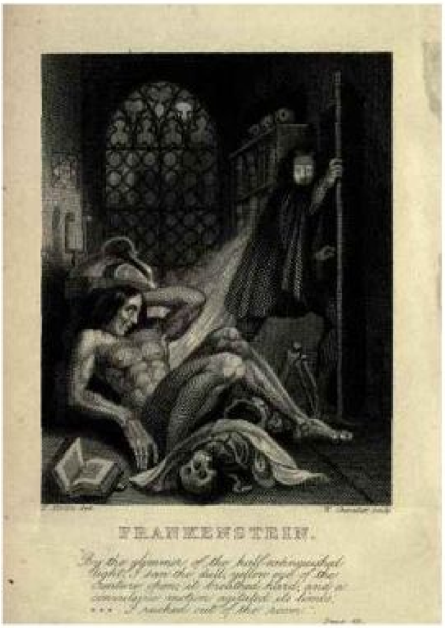
FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND (ROGER CORMAN, 1990)

Based on a novel by Brian Aldiss, in this bizarre time-travel story a 21st century scientist appears in 1817 Switzerland, where he meets Victor Frankenstein, Byron and the Shelleys. Mary takes inspiration from the real-life mystery that the main character is investigating, becomes his love interest and catches a glimpse of posterity.

GOTHIC

PHOTOS 12 / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO





ABOVE LEFT: 'The Burning of Shelley' painted by Louis Edward Fournser in 1899 and showing Byron, Edward Trelawney and Leigh Hunt burning Shelley's drowned body on a funeral pyre. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Illustration from the 1831 edition of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

William and Clara (born in 1817) left for Italy with Claire Clairmont and Allegra, fruit of her illicit relationship with Byron. They visited the poet in Venice, who, sick of Clairmont, agreed to raise the child as long as her mother didn't have anything to do with her.

The Shelleys' Italian adventure would soon become tainted by tragedy: dysentery took Clara's life in Venice in September 1818, and, less than two years later, William succumbed to malaria in Rome. Mary's dark night of the soul is palpable in Percy's words:

My dearest Mary, wherefore hast thou gone,
And left me in this dreary world alone?
Thy form is here indeed—a lovely one—
But thou art fled, gone down a dreary road
That leads to Sorrow's most obscure abode.
For thine own sake I cannot follow thee
Do thou return for mine.

Young Percy, the only one of their children who survived into old age, was born in November 1819. That very year brought bad news from their old friend Polidori. The physician, who had almost touched glory but was cursed to remain within Byron's shadow, had attempted to become a monk at Ampleforth, where he'd studied. Ironically, the prior refused to admit him, because of "certain publications which I have seen" (he was, of course, referring to *The Vampyre*). Having fallen into gambling, he ended up taking his own life at the age of 25 by swallowing prussic acid. "Poor Polidori," Byron said, "it seems that disappointment was the cause of this rash act. He had entertained too sanguine hopes of literary fame."

In 1822, the Shelleys were still living in Italy with Claire Clairmont, in a house where Mary felt like a prisoner. News reached them that Allegra, the daughter of Claire and Byron, had died of typhus in the convent where she was being raised. The same year, three months into a new pregnancy, Mary miscarried and lost so much blood that she nearly met her own death – Percy saved her life by making her sit in a bath with ice, which stopped the bleeding.

HIS BODY WASHED UP ON THE ITALIAN COAST DAYS LATER AND WAS CREMATED ON THE BEACH

By then, Shelley was plagued with visions. One night, Mary was woken by a scream. Although she called her husband's name, he would not stop screaming. He dreamed that their friends Edward and Jane Williams, who were then visiting, "came into him, they were in the most horrible condition, their bodies lacerated – their bones starting through their skin, their faces pale yet stained with blood, they could hardly walk… Edward said – Get up, Shelley, the sea is flooding the house and it is all coming down". Shelley thought he got up and saw the sea rushing in. As well as these nightmares of drowning, he saw himself strangling his wife.

Mary tended to be dismissive of his flights of fancy, particularly his recurring dopplegänger hallucinations. In a letter to Maria Gisborne, she wrote that "Shelley had often seen these figures when ill; but the strangest thing is that Mrs W[illiams] saw him". She describes her friend as a woman of little imagination, and not nervous in the slightest. That she claimed to have seen Percy's spirit double clearly unnerved Mary. Still weak and depressed after her most recent miscarriage, she had a premonition of her husband's death and begged him not to leave on the sailing trip he had planned.

Shelley didn't listen to her, and his trip ended in tragedy: he drowned in the Bay of Spezia, in Northern Italy. His body washed up on the Italian coast days later, and he was cremated on the beach. A friend of the family, Leigh Hunt, seized his heart from the ashes of his funeral pyre, and Mary, who had to fight him to recover it, was only able to do so after Mrs Williams's intervention. She kept it in her travelling desk, in a copy of *Adonaïs*, where it was found after her death, 28 years later, "dried to dust". **FT**

NOTES

1 Shelley, in fact, didn't suffer from tuberculosis, although his pale complexion and bright eyes might have suggested this.

2 Mary Shelley gave the name "Belrive" to the Frankenstein family home on the shores of Lake Geneva.

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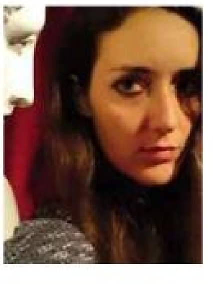

MARIA J PÉREZ CUERVO is a Bristol-based journalist with a penchant for the Gothic who specialises in history, archæology, myth and mystery. A regular FT contributor, she is on Twitter as @jpcuervo.

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FASTER, HIGHER, STRONGER – WEIRDER!

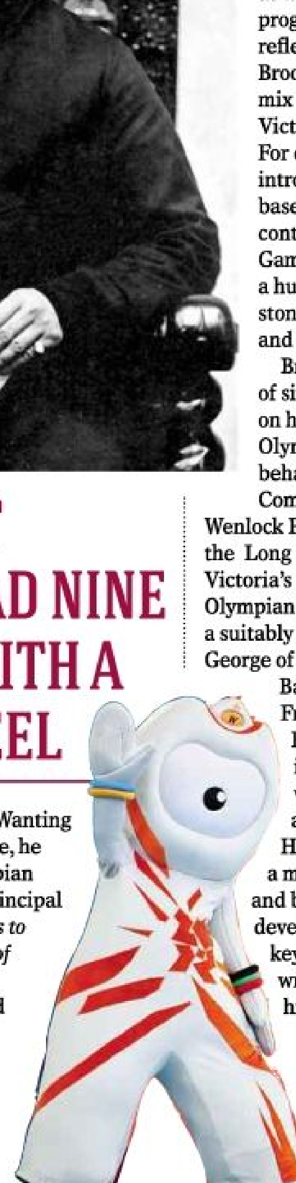
ROB GANDY celebrates the very English success story of the Wenlock Olympian Games, source of inspiration for the modern Olympics, and takes a look at some of its stranger sporting events

When I told my wife that we ought to go to this year's Olympian Games, I was surprised when she began gathering flight and hotel brochures for Rio de Janeiro. I had to gently explain that I meant the 130th Olympian Games at Much Wenlock, a small town in Shropshire, England, with a population of around 3,000, rather than the 31st Olympic Games in Brazil's second most populous city. Upon regaining consciousness I told her how it was the Wenlock Olympian Games that had inspired Baron Pierre de Coubertin to set up the first international Olympic Games in Athens in 1896, with many regarding Much Wenlock as the birthplace of the modern Olympics.[1] Accordingly, the town was the most visited place in Britain (London aside) in 2012, when the UK hosted the Olympics.

Many readers will recognise that one of the Olympic mascots for London 2012 was named 'Wenlock' (nine million "Wenlock" souvenirs were sold worldwide) in honour of the work of Dr William Penny Brookes, founder of the Wenlock Olympian Games and a major influence on the modern Olympic Games. Wenlock was designed by schoolchildren and looked like a cyclopean alien that had just landed on Earth (see **FT290-14-15**) for some sinister conspiracy theories about the design). However, I found that there were many weirder things in the early Wenlock Olympian Games...

LET THE GAMES BEGIN!

William Penny Brookes was born in Much Wenlock in 1809 and took up his father's medical practice there upon the latter's death. He found that physical exercise was good for children and campaigned for physical education in schools, rather than the drill and regimented exercises of the time – something that only came to fruition just before his own death. Wanting everybody to enjoy exercise, he started the Wenlock Olympian Games in 1850, with the principal aim being *"to provide access to sport and the arts to people of 'every grade'"*.



LEFT: Dr William Penny Brookes, founder of the Wenlock Olympian Games and a major influence on the modern Olympics. **BELOW:** The Wenlock mascot from the 2012 London Olympics.

CLIVE MASON / GETTY IMAGES

THE FIRST GAMES HAD NINE EVENTS WITH A RUSTIC FEEL

The first Games involved nine events with an English rustic feel, including cricket, football and quoits. Brookes's revival of the "manly sports of past England" offered financial as well as other prizes. Steadily the programme became more Olympian, reflecting the education and ideals of Brookes, but remained an incongruous mix of classic Olympiad and a Victorian vision of "Merry England". For example, the pentathlon was introduced in 1868, a competition based in structure, if not in sporting content, on the ancient Olympic Games. The initial five events were: a hurdle race, throwing a 32lb (14kg) stone, jumping for length and height, and climbing a 55ft (17m) rope.

Brookes was always supportive of similar Games elsewhere, and on hearing about the 1859 Athens Olympian Games he sent £10 on behalf of the Wenlock Olympian Committee. This was used for the Wenlock Prize, awarded to the winner of the Long Race. In 1877, to mark Queen Victoria's jubilee, Brookes requested an Olympian prize from Greece, and received a suitably inscribed silver cup from King George of Greece.

Baron Coubertin was shocked by France's demoralising defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, in which the Prussian soldiers were believed to be much stronger and fitter than their French foes. He saw the adoption of sports as a means of addressing this issue, and believed that the education and development of the individual was the key to the future of society. Brookes wrote to Coubertin and invited him to Much Wenlock to discuss

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: A penny-farthing race recreated in the Much Wenlock Town Museum.

the development of physical education and see the 1890 Games. However, because they took place before Coubertin could attend, Brookes arranged a special event later in the year, in the Baron's honour. They discussed Brookes's dream of staging an international Olympic revival in Athens – an idea that Coubertin then actively pursued. Brookes was listed as an honorary member of the 1894 Olympic Congress, but was unable to attend because of ill health. Sadly, he died in December 1895, and so did not live to see the first international Olympic Games, which took place four months later. In his obituary of Brookes, Coubertin wrote: "If the Olympic Games that Modern Greece has not yet been able to revive still survives today, it is due, not to a Greek, but to Dr William Penny Brookes". He later added: "The Wenlock people alone have preserved and followed the true Olympian traditions". The Wenlock Olympian Games so impressed and inspired Coubertin that he adopted several of its ideas and practices.

For example, the Wenlock medal for the pentathlon featured Nike, the winged goddess of Victory in ancient Greek religion. Coubertin went on to incorporate Nike into his Olympic medals, and she will appear on one side of this year's Rio medals. Brookes emlpoyed further ancient Greek iconography in his Wenlock Olympian Games: the winner of the Tilting at the Ring event (see below) was ceremoniously presented with a crown of olive leaves, as were Olympic winners in ancient Greece, and Coubertin continued the adoption of such imagery.

Pageantry was an important element of the Wenlock Olympian Games. As the event became more sophisticated, the procession followed suit, drawing crowds of over 10,000. A band would lead the procession of flag bearers, competitors and officials from the town to the Games site and there were also Olympian hymns and oaths. This provided the inspiration for the Olympics opening ceremonies.

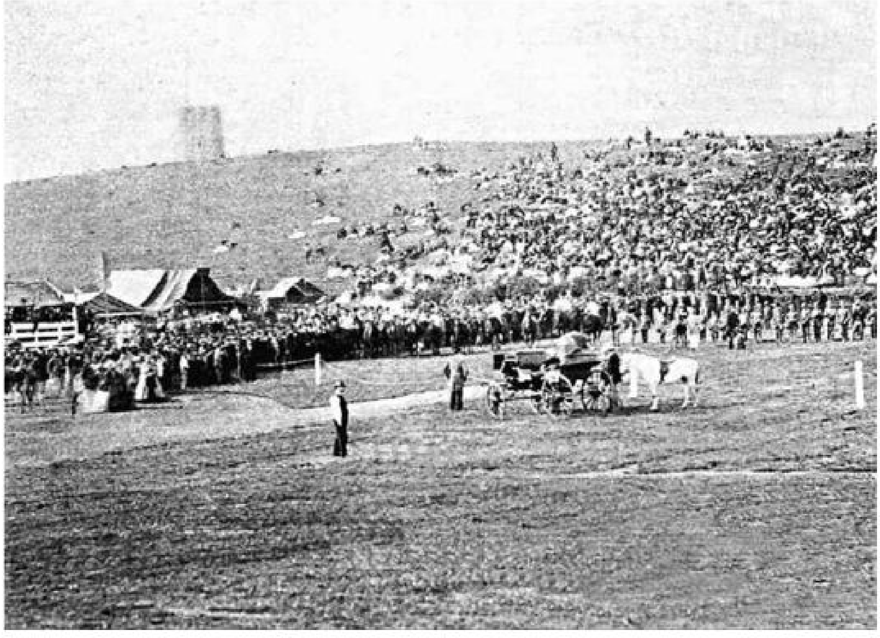
The Arts side of the Wenlock Olympian Games have found their echo in the modern Olympic Games, which saw medals for works of art awarded until 1948. Although art competitions were abandoned in 1954 (because artists were considered professionals, while Olympic athletes were required to be amateurs), since 1956, Olympic cultural programmes have taken their place, with London 2012 introducing the Cultural Olympiad.

Through the initiative of Brookes, the first Shropshire Olympian Games took place in Shrewsbury in 1860. These Games were hosted in a different town within the county biannually, with the town hosting the Games responsible for their finance. This approach to funding was adopted by the National Olympian Association (see panel), and then by Coubertin for the international Olympics.

THE WENLOCK OLYMPIAN GAMES TODAY

With the exception of a few small breaks in the 20th century, most notably during the two World Wars, the Wenlock Olympian Games have continued annually since their inception. They are organised by the Wenlock Olympian Society (WOS), a voluntary group responsible for the overarching arrangements. Its President is Jonathan Edwards CBE, the former Olympic, World, Commonwealth and European Triple Jump champion and world record holder. Individual events are organised by relevant representatives from the sport concerned (who may be local, regional or national) and run by volunteers. This is the same organisational model as the modern Olympics, where the body that organises the competition internationally provides the officials, and organises it within the Olympic umbrella. However, unlike the modern Olympics, anyone can apply to participate in the Wenlock Olympian Games, although there are obviously logistical constraints.

The 2016 Live Arts Festival was held in March at the Edge Arts Centre, William Brookes School, Much Wenlock, with competitive classes in dance, music and speech & drama for children and young people aged 18 years and under. The Half Marathon took place on 15 May, starting and finishing in Much Wenlock, and covering a scenic route of footpaths, trails, bridle paths and lanes in and around the town. The main games took place between 2 and 16 July, and included Archery, Athletics, Badminton, Fencing, Football, Gliding, Golf, Hockey, Junior Modern Biathlon, Kwik Cricket, Long Distance Walk, Netball, Road Race (over 7 miles/11km), Touch Tennis, Triathlon, and Volleyball. Other sports that regularly take place, but were absent this year, are Bowls, Clay Pigeon Shooting, Equestrian, and a Full Marathon.



WENLOCK OLYMPIAN SOCIETY

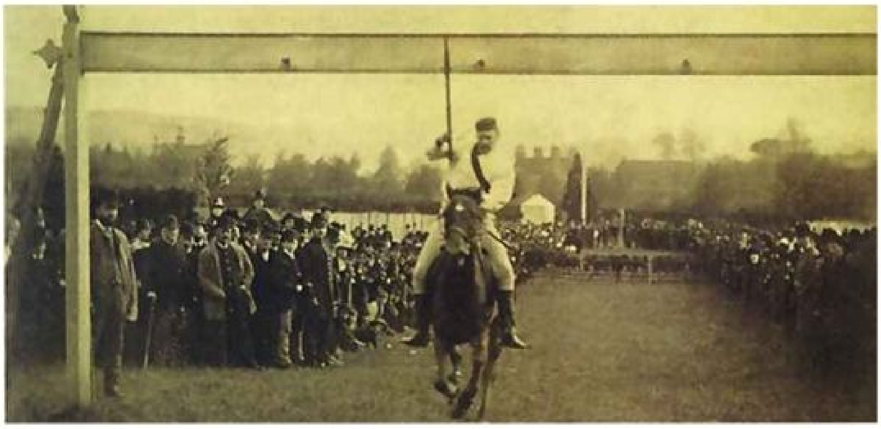
TOP: The Wenlock Olympian Games on Linden Field June 1867: this is the oldest known photograph of a sports meeting.

WEIRDER SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

The facing page lists all the more unusual sports and activities found on WOS programmes over the years. Some will be familiar from old school sports days, such as the egg and spoon race and the three-legged race, or be recognised as sports that have fallen from general favour (Tug of War). But others, which may have taken place infrequently, or only once, either require some explanation or are just downright weird. However, all events should be seen in the context of the time, and Brookes's ambition to improve mankind – minds as well as bodies – which is one reason why Arts events were seen as so important.

The top event in the early years was Tilting at the Ring, which was constantly described as being the most popular, reportedly attracting a crowd of 10,000 in 1876. It recreated the practice of knights' jousting tournaments, with mounted horsemen charging under a frame on which hung a small metal ring. The objective was to dislodge the ring with the lance and keep it there until the horseman passed under the frame. In later years the event increased in difficulty with hurdles introduced.

The second half of the 19th century saw Britain involved in many conflicts, including the Crimean and Boer wars. Therefore, military-linked events were an opportunity for soldiers to show off their skills. The Balaclava Melee was a mounted mock-brawl in which soldiers armed with singlesticks attempted to knock plumes from each other's helmets, while tent pegging involved spearing a series of small wooden pegs driven into the ground. Points were scored according to whether or not the peg remained intact. This feat derived from daring riders charging into hostile camps and literally spearing out the tent pegs, thereby trapping their enemies inside the collapsing canopies.



WENLOCK OLYMPIAN SOCIETY

THE BALACLAVA MELEE WAS A MOUNTED MOCK-BRAWL

The Victoria Cross Race was a competition over fences, where riders had to collect man-size dummies, usually filled with straw – which represented wounded men to be rescued – put them over the horse's withers, and then gallop home.

The origins of the Zulu Contest are self-evident. Some people currently want Darts to be an Olympic sport, but darts players are wimps compared to anyone who can hit a target with an assegai from 60 feet (18m)!

Putting a quarry stone may sound rather strange, but it was a special event aimed at the men who worked in the various local limestone quarries. The stone weighed 56lb (25kg), and the competition required each man to throw it with one hand – in a similar way to the current shot put – and then to throw it again but with his other hand. The winner was the man whose combined distance was the greatest. Now that is a *real* trial of strength.

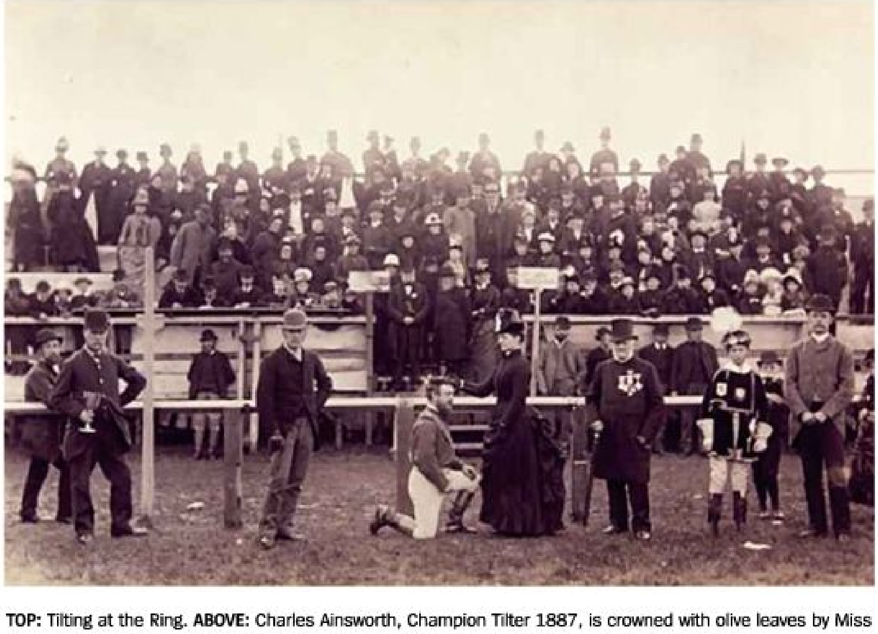
Cycling was a popular sport, but it must be remembered that bicycles were different at that time, and riders used to race on penny-farthings. There were one-mile and three-mile races, lapping around the Linden Field sports site. Initially, there were only four competitors, and Thomas Sabin from Coventry was the first winner, delighting spectators with a "speedy performance". There were frequent collisions between cyclists and spectators, and falling off a penny-farthing was an occupational hazard. There are various reports of Sabin coming off, then remounting, pedalling like fury and still taking first place. Apparently he trained by "giving up smoking". Nowadays, vintage cycle racing on penny-farthings takes place, and always wows the crowds.

Although the Games' programme steadily grew throughout their first decade, it was evident that their success with the public lay (at least in part) in the less serious competitions, some being for all ages, which Brookes organised primarily for entertainment and to get people to attend. One example is climbing a greasy pole, but there is no information about how many politicians took part.

In 1854, a blindfold wheelbarrow race took place. Unfortunately, I have not been able to establish whether the blindfolded men raced on their own or with a partner sitting in the wheelbarrow issuing directions. It was reported that one winner somersaulted over a hedge at the end to celebrate. Presumably he took off his blindfold first.

In 1856 there was an old ladies race for a pound of tea; the only time women competed in the Games under Brookes's ægis. This was not, as some might surmise from the description, a race where old women chased after a pound of tea somehow raised aloft; the tea was the valuable prize in a foot race. It was reported that the contestants "acquitted themselves remarkably well, considering the disadvantage under which they laboured in not being provided with the 'bloomer costume' attire in which they would have run capitally". The "elderly" winner was 45-year-old Mary Speake, with 38-year-old Anne Meredith in second place.

The jingling match was a kind of "blind-man's-bluff" with bells, and involved



WENLOCK OLYMPIAN SOCIETY

TOP: Tilting at the Ring. **ABOVE:** Charles Ainsworth, Champion Tilter 1887, is crowned with olive leaves by Miss Serjeantson, daughter of the Rector of Acton Burnell. William Penny Brookes stands to her right.

Weird Olympian Events

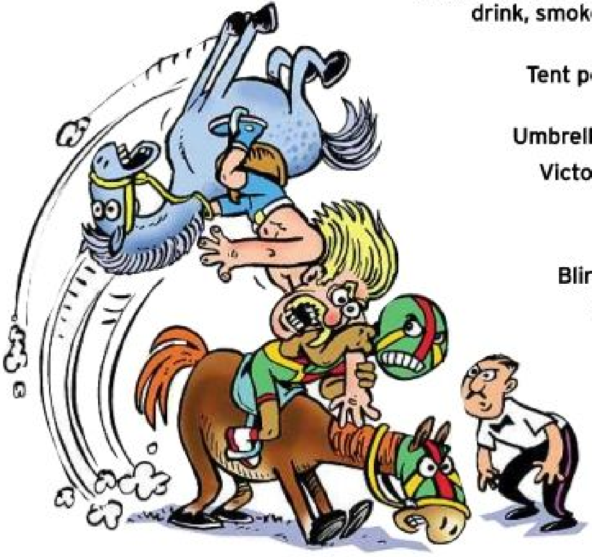
ATHLETIC EVENTS

Climbing a 55ft rope
Cycling (on Penny-farthings)
Drill displays (linked with Gymnastics)
Egg and Spoon race
Hopping 50 yards on one leg
Obstacle race
Pole leaping
Putting a quarry stone
Quoits
Regatta (Shrewsbury 1864):
Coracle race & Punt race
Sack race
Three-legged race
Throwing cricket ball
Throwing spear in distance
Tug of War
Wheel race
Zulu contest (throwing assegai at target 60ft away)

MILITARY-LINKED EVENTS

(ALL ON HORSEBACK)

Balaclava Melee
Gimcrack race (stop horse, dismount, put boots on, jump, drink, smoke cigar, and repeat at set intervals)
Horseback wrestling
Tent pegging (for Coubertin Games)
Tilting at the Ring
Umbrella and Cigar race for Yeomanry
Victoria Cross race for Yeomanry



FUN EVENTS

Blindfolded wheelbarrow race
Climbing a greasy pole
Donkey race
Jingling match
Old women race
for a pound of tea
Pig race
Pole climbing
Prison Base

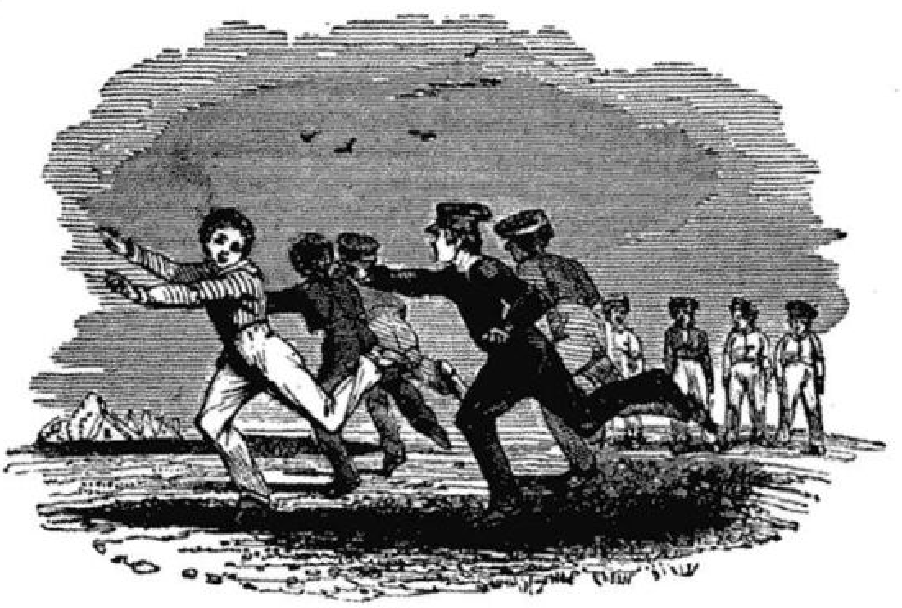
ARTS EVENTS

Arithmetic
Best odes • Best poem
Brass Band contest • Drawing • Water colour/landscapes/still life
English essay • English history
Glee singing • Handwriting
Intellectual and industrial attainments
Knitting • Knitting stockings
Making a shirt • Sewing

Solo singing
Spelling
Scripture history

PRIZES FOR 3 "R"S OF SCHOOL: READING, WRITING AND ARITHMETIC
PRIZES FOR 3 "R"S OF ATHLETICS: RUNNING, RIDING AND WRESTLING

ILLUSTRATIONS: HUNT EMERSON



ABOVE: Prison base, as played at the Wenlock Olympian Games, had its origins in mediæval times. **BELOW:** A memorial to Dr William Penny Brookes in Holy Trinity Church, Much Wenlock.

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG / GETTY IMAGES

blindfolded children chasing a man who had bells about his person. The child that caught him was the winner. If this were repeated today it would probably present a health and safety nightmare.

Prison base was a game of mediæval origins played by two teams. Effectively a serial tag game: the first team send out a player, then the second team send out a player to tag the first team's player, followed by the first team sending out a player to tag the second team's player, and so on. The goal was to tag out the other team's players before they reached their designated 'home'. Played by both adults and children, it was so popular with some citizens of 14th century London that Edward III banned it from the grounds of his Palace of Westminster, because the games were so noisy and rambunctious that they distracted his government ministers from their work.[2]

Arguably, the most bizarre event was the pig chase. A report stated: "The pig started in the middle of the field and led its pursuers over hedge and ditch right into town where it took ground in the cellar of Mr Blakeway's house and where is was captured by a man named William Hill." [3] The prize was the pig, which the winner got to take home with him. I could not find out what Mr Hill did with the pig, but pork scratchings have always been a West Midlands delicacy.

Finally, special mention must be made of the associated Arts events, with prizes for "intellectual and industrial attainment". For example, the best needlewoman won a workbox, while the winner of the history competition received a writing desk. The prospect of competitive knitting as an Olympic sport may sound strange, but based on my personal participation in a competitive knitting match at school in the 1960s I can assure readers that it can be very exciting, albeit not particularly telegenic.

In some years, the knitting event was open only to girls under the age of 14, while in others there was an additional competition for adult women. In each case, prizes were awarded for "the quickest and the best knitting".[4]

AN OLYMPIAN LEGACY

Not only were the Wenlock Olympian Games the inspiration for the modernday Olympics, but they have also stimulated a Community Games movement around the world; since 2012, there have been more than 4,000 Community Games events, supported by over 85,000 volunteers with an estimated three million people participating. [5] The WOS is contacted regularly by event organisers, and one in Australia has actually staged an old ladies race for a pound of tea!

That the games are renowned across the world was reflected when a group of aspiring young Brazilian athletes turned up to participate in 2012, much to WOS's surprise. They simply wanted to see where the Olympic Games had started, and were excited to become "Olympian" medallists.

It's certainly worth paying a visit to the Games – they are great fun and retain a certain English charm, in accordance with their origins; and even if you are just passing through the town at other times, there is a signposted Olympian Trail that guides you around the relevant landmarks, starting and finishing at the Wenlock Museum, where a fine collection of Olympian artefacts are displayed.[6]

The Wenlock Olympian Society is a fine custodian of Dr Brookes's legacy – and long may the games continue. Personally, I would like to see if a different example of the more bizarre games could be re-staged each year – just for fun, as Brookes originally intended. The open participation nature of the games means that, even at my age, I could still become an Olympian myself. Perhaps I should wait and see if they re-introduce the blindfold wheelbarrow race first...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Chris Cannon, WOS Archivist, who provided advice, documents and insights, and kindly checked my draft article to make sure there were no errors. The majority of citations are from the many publications he kindly provided. Therefore, only other sources are specifically referenced.

FURTHER READING

Readers may wish to find out more about the Wenlock Olympian Games and their influence on the modern Olympic Games. A first port of call is the WOS's own website (www.wenlock-olympian-society.org.uk/) which provides a wealth of information. In June 2016 the WOS published a new book: *The Story of Wenlock Olympian Society and William Penny Brookes (Inspiration for the International Olympic Games)* ISBN 9781861472205, priced £6.99. Two more first-rate references are: Martin Polley, *The British Olympics: Britain's Olympic Heritage 1612-2012 (Played in Britain)*. English Heritage, 2011 (ISBN 9781848020580) and Catherine Beale, *Born Out of Wenlock: William Penny Brookes and the British Origins of the Modern Olympics*. DB Publishing, 2011 (ISBN 9781859839676).

NOTES

1 Sam Mullins, *British Olympians: William Penny Brookes & the Olympic Games*, London, 1986, p10.

2 www.shakespeare-online.com/biography/sportshakespeare.html

3 'Much Wenlock – The Olympic Games,' *Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 10 Sep 1858, p5.

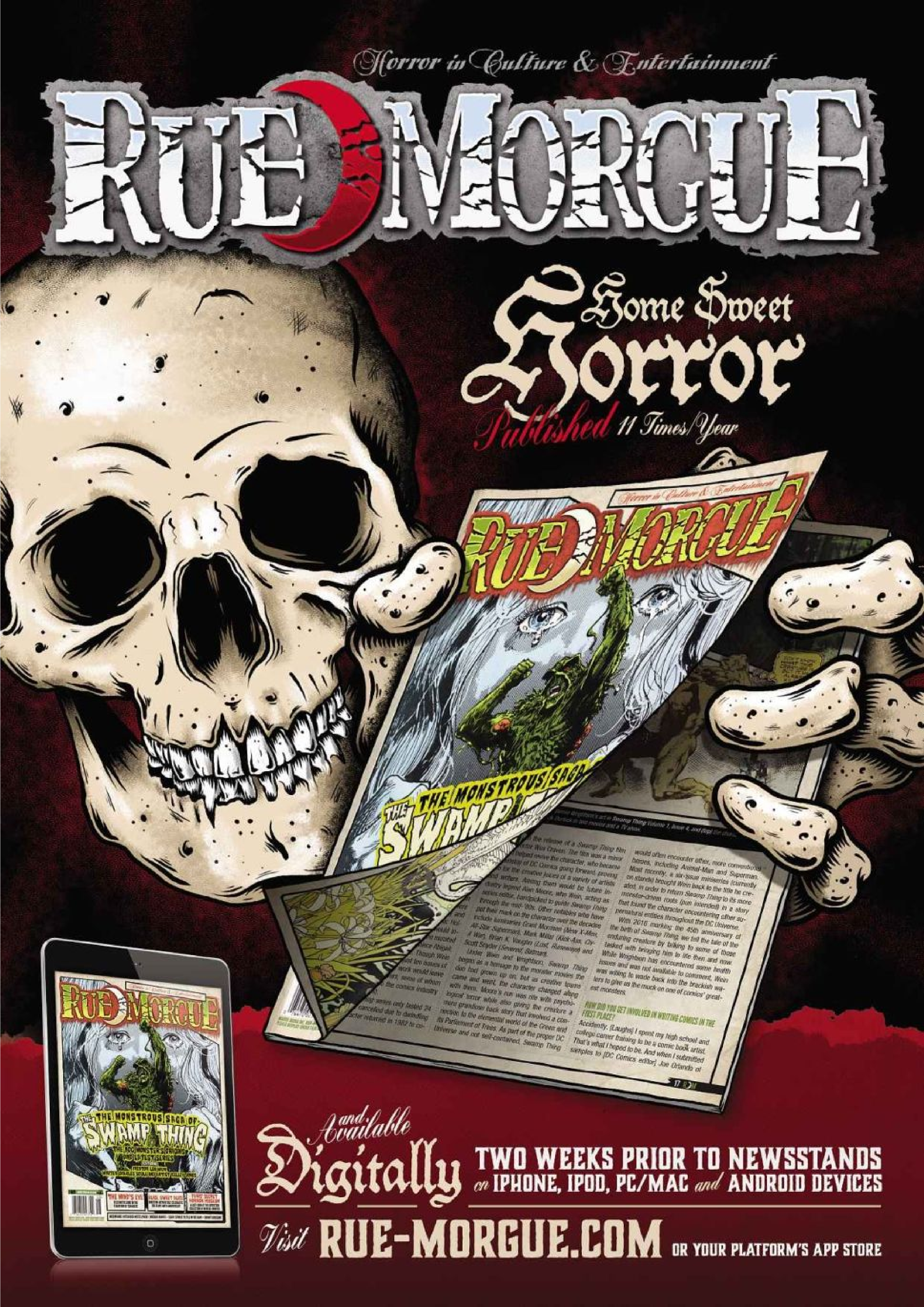
4 Wenlock Olympian Society, 1852, Minute Book (Aug 20), Wenlock Olympian Society Archives. A recommended read is Martin Polley, 'Knitting and the Olympic Games: Clothing, Competition, Culture, and Commerce, *TEXTILE*, 12:1, 2014, pp72-85.

5 www.communitygames.org.uk/

6 A pdf copy of the Olympic Trail can be downloaded from: www.wenlock-olympian-society.org.uk/history/wenlock-olympian-trail/

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

ROB GANDY is a visiting professor at the Liverpool Business School, John Moores University. He has written for FT on Merseyside doppelgängers, ghostlore, football curses and phantom hitchhikers.



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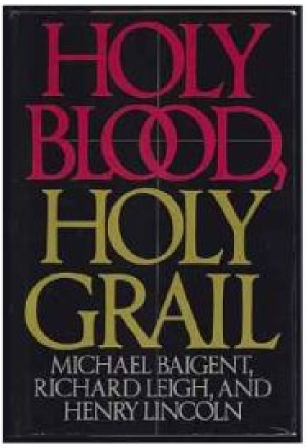
11. BLOOD AND TEARS

The byways of fortean literature are long and sinuous, not to say tortuous, and oftentimes criss-cross in unexpected places. One of the major routes to one such tangle of lanes is signposted: *'The truth about things everyone's been wrong about until we came along'*. Leading off the main drag one finds lanes to such catastrophist re-assemblers of cosmic history as Velikovsky, Comyns-Beaumont, and the recently published improbabilities propounded by Gary Gilligan (*Extraterrestrial Sands*, Matador). History, whether concerning the life of the Solar System, the death of Marilyn Monroe, the secrets of the pyramids or the wanderings of the Jews – and everything in between – seems particularly prone to this kind of wide-eyed revisionism. It finds its highest expression in the most elaborate conspiracy thinking, the simpler notions of conspiracy and cover-up being in any case but a step away from drastically unconventional history. If it weren't, after all, why weren't we told all this in school? In any case, your bookshelf should not be without the exposure of what the blurb calls "The most shattering secret of the last two thousand years", if only as an object lesson in how careful promoters of radical reinterpretations of history need to be. But it's still loads of fun to read.



Holy Blood, Holy Grail landed on a suitably astonished world in 1982. Authored by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln (hereafter BL&L), it built on a number of television documentaries written in the 1970s by Lincoln about the mysteries allegedly surrounding the Aude, France, village of Rennes-le-Château and its *abbé*, François-Bérenger de Saunière (1852-1916). It is difficult to lay out the route the authors take from there to their concluding hypothesis, because they dart about somewhat over 300-plus pages before announcing it, but they start with de Saunière's unexplained and seemingly sudden accumulation of wealth, and speculate that this may have something to do with the long-since disappeared, and reputedly fabulous, wealth of the Knights Templar, suppressed by the Pope in 1312. Not long after, the last leading Cathar was executed, ending an heretical Gnostic movement that the Church had been trying to eradicate for over a century. Rennes is in the heart of formerly Cathar country. Our authors become convinced that both Templars and Cathars had a far greater secret to hide than unorthodox beliefs and immense wealth, assisted in their belief by de Saunière's reported discovery of some ancient parchments in his church. Was he being paid off in order to keep quiet about their contents?

Hereafter the plot thickens. BL&L become aware of various papers found in the Bibliothèque Nationale, which they refer to as the '*Dossiers secrets*'. These reveal the existence of the Prieuré de Sion, and its shadowy control of the Templars. We are given a remarkable list of its Grand Masters (*Nautonniers*, or helmsmen), starting with Jean de Gisors in 1188, ending with Victor Hugo (1844–85), Claude Debussy (1885–1918) and, from 1918, Jean Cocteau. The list includes Nicolas Flamel, Leonardo da Vinci, and Isaac Newton. BL&L produce more-or-less plausible reasons for each individual being so honoured, although those who were but children when appointed stretch their justificatory imaginations somewhat, along with the reader's credulity. In exploring their idea of this secret society's history, the authors take a weird veer off-piste to consider the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This grotesque antisemitic tract, they conclude (flying yet further in the face of all orthodox scholarship), started life as an authentic *Masonic* masterplan for gaining power. It was thereafter doctored to become the nasty piece of work that we know today. The authors' detection of sundry Masonic traces ("anomalies") in the text shows a strange, although perhaps revealing, ignorance of the conflation of Judaism and Masonry among Russian antisemites in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But the *Protocols* are still, they say, "of paramount importance to the Prieuré de Sion" today (i.e. the early 1980s). In due course, we'll suggest why they may have come to entertain such an eccentricity.

Next, we have an outline of the Merovingian dynasty of French kings, whose line ended when Pope Zachary deposed Childeric III in 752. But not according to the *Dossiers secrets* and additional documents the authors call the 'Prieuré papers'. The Merovingian line (which they duly trace) continued in secret, reaching one apex in the crusader Godfroi de Bouillon (1060-1100), who for his trouble became King of Jerusalem – although (BL&L don't tell us) he refused to adopt the title. De Bouillon, they establish to their own satisfaction, was also a descendant of Lohengrin and Parsifal, keepers of the Holy Grail – which was said to have been brought from Judea to southern France by Mary Magdalene. BL&L puzzle over the nature of the Grail and realise that the word *sangraal* can be interpreted as *san graal* (holy grail) or *sang réal* (holy blood). So, goes their leap of insight, the Magdalene brought not a holy relic but the blood of Jesus, in the shape of one or more children, to France, and therein lie the roots of the Merovingian dynasty, who thus have a claim to the French throne. One of these, they duly discover, is alive and well and the (then) present *Nautonnière* of the Prieuré de Sion.

BL&B's exposition of the likelihood that the Nazarene was married, and the actual identity of the Magdalene, is based on reliable scholarship and is the best part of the book. Particularly noteworthy is their clear exposition of why, in the New Testament, the Jews get to carry the can as 'Christ-killers' and the Romans, who actually did the dirty work, get a good press – an elucidation not well-known at the time outside those familiar with Jewish accounts of the era.

Various authors had written on the apparent mysteries of Rennes-le-Château (some even dragging leys into their

CHOSOVI / CREATIVE COMMONS

LEFT: The hilltop village of Rennes-le-Château.

musings), the Merovingians, Templars, Cathars, and the intriguing nature of Mary Magdalene and her relationship with Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed some of the ideas floated in *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* bear a distinct resemblance to those of Nikos Kazantzakis in his novel *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1955). Even so, it would be fair to say that the book kick-started a cottage industry in the English-speaking world, which continues in production to this day. In 1996, having published a sequel in 1986 (*The Messianic Legacy*, reviewed **FT51:77-78**), BB&L produced an updated edition. Then in 2003 Dan Brown had a huge bestseller with his spectacularly badly written *The Da Vinci Code*, and in 2006 Leigh and Baigent rashly decided to sue Brown (for £140 million) for plagiarising their work (see **FT209:4-5, 210:5**. Lincoln declined to join them in the suit. In the Channel Five documentary *Revealed... The Man behind the Da Vinci Code*, he said the ideas behind *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* were not original, and Brown had been no more than "a bit naughty" in relying on them. (It also so happens that an earlier novel had already used a similar theme: *The Dreamer of the Vine* (1980), by Liz Greene. Greene was Leigh's sister and also Baigent's girlfriend at the time, and was not sued for anything.) The claim was doomed from the start, since BB&L presented their work as a justifiable hypothesis based on actual historical facts. You can't plagiarise even a tenuously proven *fact*: the writing of history, let alone of historical novels, would grind to a halt overnight. (*Cf.* Georgette Heyer's *The Spanish Bride* (1940) and the *Autobiography* of Sir Harry Smith (1901) – both good rollicking non-fortean reads.) Baigent and Leigh duly lost their case, and faced £3 million in legal costs.

The dreadful irony of this foreseeable disaster is that the key foundations of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* are themselves mostly fiction. To judge from remarks *passim* and their bibliography, the authors are quite capable of reading French and know how to conduct basic research, whatever their eccentric conclusions. Yet they launched their quest in the apparent belief that l'Abbé François-Bérenger de Saunière had suddenly and mysteriously gained access to enormous wealth. Not too exhaustive an investigation would have alerted them to the real source of de Saunière's curiously large income. By 1901 he had already been warned twice by his bishop about his promiscuous sale of Masses. This was a peculiar practice of the kind satirised centuries before by Chaucer: cross a Catholic priest's palm with some cash, and he would say a Mass (or a hundred of them) for you, your dead grandma, possibly even Robespierre if you coughed up enough. The Church tolerated this, but de Saunière took to advertising for custom in parish magazines, not just in France but globally. He ended up with more Masses (and the wampum that went with them) to say than several pious lifetimes could accommodate. The official limit was three per day, and de Saunière was suspended from duty – one stop short of excommunication – in 1909. This was reported in contemporary newspapers and again in 1967. The source of de Sauniere's wealth was also revealed in René Descadeillas' *Mythologie du trésor de Rennes*, published in 1974 – well in time for BB&L to have come across it – the title alone should have caught their eyes.

> "THE COVERS OF THIS BOOK ARE TOO FAR APART."
>
> *Ambrose Bierce*

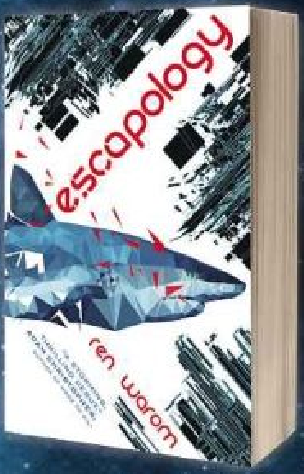
As for the Prieuré de Sion. Fairly early on in their research BB&L came across Pierre Plantard by way of their contacts with Gérard de Sède, author of *Le Trésor Maudit de Rennes-le-Château* (1977), the paperback that first set Henry Lincoln on his great quest. Not too much research – no more than they put into the more obscure corners of French history – should have revealed to them precisely who he was, and a greater degree of logic and caution should have at least have made them suspect that the *Dossiers secrets* and other 'Prieuré papers' on which BB&L relie so heavily are – often quite cleverly crafted – forgeries by de Sède, Plantard, and Philippe de Chérisy. It is a bit of a giveaway that the first of these, *Le Serpent Rouge*, was deposited in the Bibliothèque National a few days after its authors' death by hanging. BB&L do not elaborate on who hanged them or why, but the curious fact is that their families insist that they were unknown to one another. BB&L did not look too closely into other documents in the *Dossiers secrets* either: for example, a 1960s letter purporting to be from the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association was disowned in a 1972 letter by Martin G Hamlyn, the Association's president, who pointed out that the letterhead of the one found in the *Dossiers* had not been used by them since 1950, and that ABA had departed the address therein in 1948. BB&L's efforts at authentication seem to have been just a little relaxed.

Whether or not they were in a position to discover everything relevant about Plantard's life, it might have emerged from sedulous research how often he changed his name, his sundry pseudonyms, and his fantasy life as an inventor of 'secret' societies that never actually did anything, and often bore the names of distinguished individuals who had no idea they had been dragooned as officers. Particularly revealing is a letter released in 2015 written under the name – there is no handwritten signature – of 'Varran de Verestra' (the Paris police seem to have known this was Plantard) to Marshal Pétain, Head of State of Vichy France, on 16 December 1940. Plantard opens by begging Pétain to "put a stop to a war started by the Jews", and goes on: "Sir, your life is in danger, the revolution is already underway... In just eight days it may perhaps be in full swing. YOU MUST ACT! Immediately upon receiving this letter you must issue strict but totally confidential orders. You must put an immediate stop to this terrible 'Masonic and Jewish' conspiracy in order to save both France and the world as a whole from terrible carnage."

Which may give us a clue as to why our authors made the deviant effort they did, the way they did, to rehabilitate the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. As throughout their book, they would have been wise to have been a little more circumspect. Or even tasteful. FT

Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, Jonathan Cape 1982; revised edition, Arrow Books 1996.

EPIC TALES FROM TITAN BOOKS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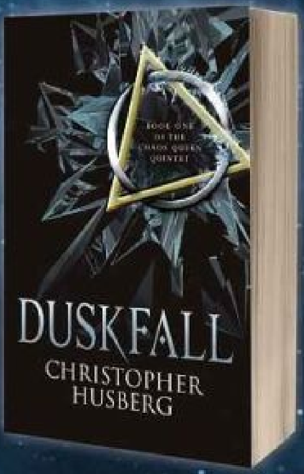
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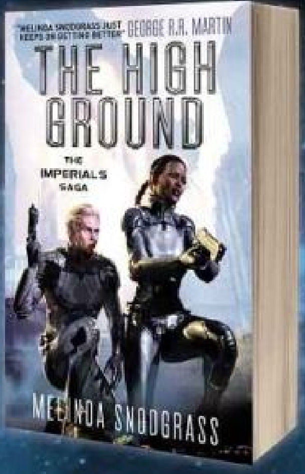
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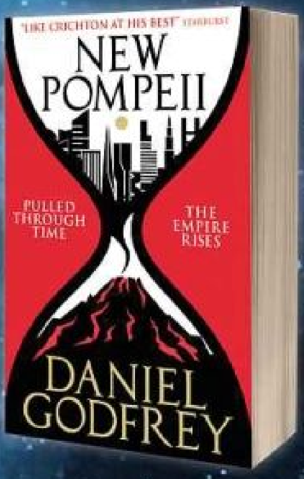
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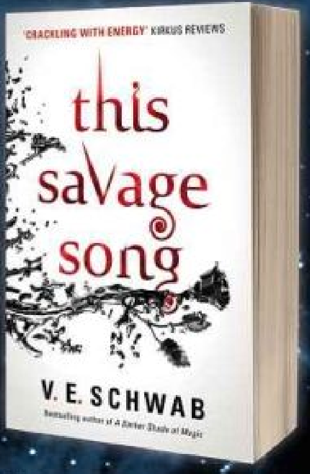
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The Last Trump?

Donald Trump's bid for the presidency has excited prophecies of political doom, but will he quite literally unleash the apocalypse asks **TED HARRISON**.

TED HARRISON is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent. A regular contributor to FT, he is the author of many books on religious and fortean subjects.

Undeterred by some recent high-profile failures, America's endgame soothsayers have gone into overdrive over the apocalyptic significance of Donald Trump. He is chosen as the leader of the free world directly by God, say some charismatic conservatives. Take the letters 'IHS', the ancient Greek logo for Christ, add 'TRUMP' and you get 'TRIUMPHS'. God has provided a divine crossword clue to tell his followers of his intentions.

On the other hand, through his family connections, Donald Trump provides evidence that he is the Antichrist incarnate. Can it be a coincidence that his son-in-law owns one of the most conspicuous pieces of downtown real estate in New York – 666 Fifth Avenue?

In April this year retired fire fighter Mark Taylor was invited onto the 'Christian' television channel Trunews to share a prophecy he had received five years earlier, long before Donald Trump declared his intention to run for office. Supposedly God spoke to Taylor as he watched Trump on television.

"I have chosen this man, Donald Trump, for such a time as this.... The enemy will quake and shake and fear this man I have anointed... I will use this man to reap the harvest that the United States has sown and plunder from the enemy what he has stolen and return it seven-fold back to the United States."

Later Taylor elaborated on his message: political attacks on Trump were the work of the kingdom of darkness and opposition at his rallies was demonically inspired. "This man is literally splitting the kingdom of darkness right open," claimed Taylor.

Such words do not come with the endorsement of all on the Christian right. Todd Starnes of Fox News noted that many Evangelical Christians "are still not convinced that the man who has had more wives than there are letters to the Corinthians shares their view from the pew.

"For many Christians Donald Trump is like a bucket of store-bought chicken at a Wednesday night church supper. It may be a culinary heresy, but folks will still eat it."

When the evangelist Jim Bakker, who despite a history of scandal still hosts a television show, pointed out that Trump was hardly known as a Bible-reading, God-fearing citizen, his guest, author Mary Colbert, received applause when she said that Christians had to "line up with what God wants".

And what God wants, Taylor says, is for a man to lead America and Israel to greatness. Israel has a key role in all Christian endgame prophecies as it is claimed that the Bible predicts that the return of Jesus, the last Judgment and final battle will all happen there.

The last widely reported doomsday prophet was Harold Camping, whose dire warnings lost credibility when his much heralded Doomsday date of 21 May 2011 passed without incident (**FT277:26-27; 285:34-37; 287:5**). He was in a long tradition of American preachers who have ended up with apocalyptic egg on their faces. William Miller said Doomsday would be in 1843, and tens of thousands believed him, while Herbert W Armstrong said it would be 1936 (**FT129:34-36; 300:34-35**).

However, Mark Taylor's prophecy has a more sinister twist. God will 'remove' – in other words kill – anyone who stands between Donald Trump and the presidency. Taylor cites as an example the death of White House aide Jake Brewer, who in September last year died in a cycle accident during a charity bike ride.

ABOVE: The Donald contemplates the End of Days, while behind him looms 666 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

ETHAN MILLER / GETTY IMAGES

While Trump does not endorse the extreme end of charismatic prophecy, he has the political instincts to ride the wave: he targets the Christian constituency and stokes their fears. In an interview on CBN, a widely viewed Christian television channel, he declared: "I am Protestant. I am Presbyterian. Most people don't know that..." He then went on to identify with the Christian voters further. "We have Christians being beheaded all over the world by ISIS. In Syria and in Iraq, in particular, those Christians can't come into this country. If you're a Muslim, you can come into the country very easy... The Christians are being treated horribly because we have nobody to represent the Christians. Believe me... I will be the greatest representative of the Christians they've had in a long time."

Evangelical right-wingers do not have a monopoly on Trump prophecies. Students of Nostradamus have gone back to the strange quatrains of the 16th century sage for guidance. Supposedly, the far-seeing astrologer "told of the false trumpet concealing madness". He also wrote: "The trumpet shakes with great discord". Possibly, he predicted Trump's rise and defeat, for the quatrain ends: "The face anointed with milk and honey lies on the ground". However, as Nostradamus is always obscure and the word 'trumpet' occurs so frequently in his many hundreds of prophecies it is not surprising that imagined references to the next Republican presidential candidate are easy to find.

Indeed perhaps all will end well. "The Eagle driven back around the tents; Will be chased from there by other birds: When the noise of cymbals, trumpets and bells; Will restore the senses of the lady". The Eagle is the national emblem of the USA, and as for the "the lady"... could she be Hillary Clinton?

Yet most American Christians expecting the Rapture, Last Judgment and final defeat of Satan will look elsewhere for guidance. They might open their Bibles to 1 *Corinthians* 15 and read: "The dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." And this will all happen "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump". FT

Wiccan nudist head trip

The psychedelic explosion of 1966-67 saw various exchanges between the UK counterculture and the world of the occult. CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE recalls the career of naturist Jack Bracelin, a forgotten figure who linked the two worlds.

CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE is a library cataloguer, writer and regular FT contributor. His book about Gef the Talking Mongoose will be published this autumn by Strange Attractor Press.

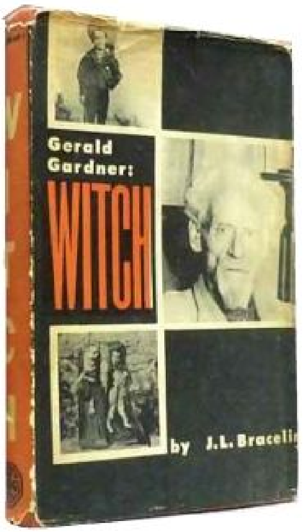
It's well known that the 1960s British music scene accompanied and assisted the rise in popularity of occult beliefs and practices. In 1967, John Lennon chose Aleister Crowley to appear amongst the crowd of "people we like" on Peter Blake's *Sgt Pepper* album cover. The Rolling Stones' flirtation with black magic is well documented, with Mick Jagger revealing a fake tattoo of Lucifer on his chest during a performance of 'Sympathy For The Devil,' for their 1968 *Rock & Roll Circus* TV film. It was during this period that filmmaker, occultist, and Crowley disciple Kenneth Anger (see **FT82:49; 231:51-52**) was one of a select few admitted to the Stones' inner circle. The apocalyptic Process Church of the Final Judgement was proselytising in London during this period (see **FT134:34-39**), at one point bringing Marianne Faithfull into its orbit. Another Crowley acolyte, R&B organist and singer Graham Bond, was a regular on the scene, later recording several overtly occult-themed LPs.

Earlier still, in terms of witchcraft (as opposed to magick), Alex Sanders, the self-styled 'King of the Witches', together with his wife Maxine Sanders, were also in contact with the counterculture during this period. Their home at Clanricarde Gardens, Notting Hill Gate, became something of an open house for young people, curious about the Sanderses' brand of witchcraft. "Wherever Alex and I went, we seemed to act like magnets on young people," Maxine recalled.[1]

According to her, some of these visitors, high on LSD, were dismayed to find, when inside the house, that Alex had the power to nullify the drug's effects. "Alex has these powers and he used them on these youngsters and so, at times, infuriated them… They spent pounds on LSD and there they were, hauled right down to the ground."[2] Sanders would then offer to show them a method of getting high without drugs, teaching the young 'freaks' astral projection, which he saw as related to the LSD experience but offering a safer, more controlled means of tripping.

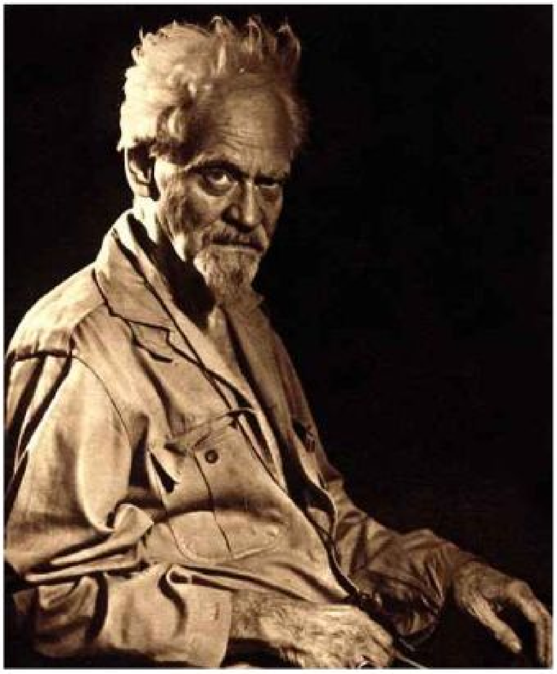
Another witchcraft connection, which indirectly links the 1960s freak culture to the founder of Wicca, Gerald Gardner, was Jack Bracelin.

In March 1956, Bracelin, a 29-year-old sales rep from Swiss Cottage, was initiated into Gardner's coven and became his right-hand man. He was the administrator for Gardner's Five Acres naturist club at Bricket Wood, Hertfordshire, where the coven would meet, and also the ostensible author of the 1960 book *Gerald Gardner: Witch* (in fact, Sufi mystic and writer Idries Shah, another friend and associate of Gardner's, had written a good deal of the biography, but wanted to preserve his anonymity).



BELOW: Gerald Gardner, founder of Wicca.

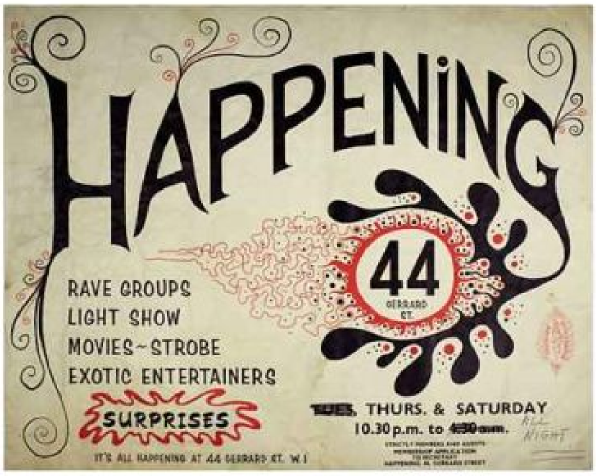
ABOVE: Jack Bracelin became Gardner's right hand man and co-biographer, before abandoning Wicca for naturism and psychedelica.



Gardner died in February 1964 leaving £1,000 to Bracelin, who had by now begun to immerse himself in Britain's nascent counterculture. A 1957 schism among coven members, followed by Gardner's death, had led Bracelin to question whether their secretive, initiate-only system was the most effective means to promote "life-affirming Goddess values".[3] He came to view the psychedelic movement as embodying a truer expression of such values.

Within a couple of years he was one of the first light show artists at underground clubs like the legendary UFO. Compared with today's sophisticated laser shows and other digitally driven displays, the projectors and 35mm slides of the 1960s underground might appear crude, but these were effectively some of the first multimedia performances. The combination of sound with light in a sort of synæsthetic experience offered the ideal means to simulate or enhance an LSD trip. Bracelin was in at the very beginning of the scene, in 1966, with weekly fund-raising events for the London Free School at All Saints Hall in Westbourne Grove; this was to become UFO when it relocated to the Blarney Club just north of Tottenham Court Road tube station. Promoter and manager Joe Boyd, who organised UFO together with John 'Hoppy' Hopkins (see **FT326:24-25**), remembers Bracelin thus: "Fifty years old, doing a light show at UFO. He came from Watford where he ran a nudist colony… Hoppy knew him and we gave him a little corner of UFO. He didn't have the main light show but he had a corner and people could go and dance in his lights. Basically he was a nudist. And there were a lot of people like this; it wasn't just a generational thing." Indeed, in honour of the Five Acre naturist club and the Bricket Wood coven, Bracelin named his light show company the Five Acre Light Show.

Bracelin would go on to set up his own club, Happening 44, where he was able to run the main light show with his wife Pamela. Writer Chris Rowley also had difficulty in pigeonholing the Bracelins: "Happening 44 was a small psychedelic club that ran for about five or six months… It was basically run by a couple of old… beatniks isn't the right word." Rowley was, at the time, a journalist for underground newspaper *IT* (*International Times*, its fortunes closely tied to those of UFO; it's been suggested that the club was in


HAPPENING
44
GERRARD ST.
RAVE GROUPS
LIGHT SHOW
MOVIES~STROBE
EXOTIC ENTERTAINERS
SURPRISES
~~TUES.~~ THURS. & SATURDAY
10.30 p.m. to ~~4.30 a.m.~~ ALL NIGHT
IT'S ALL HAPPENING AT 44 GERRARD ST. W.1

ADAM RITCHIE / REDFERNS

ABOVE LEFT: A poster for Bracelin's Happening 44 club, in Soho's Gerrard Street, promising a light show, rave groups and exotic entertainers.

ABOVE RIGHT: Pink Floyd appear at the UFO Club in December 1966, accompanied by a light show and dancers.

part set up to generate funds to meet the paper's running costs). He recalls a visit to the Bracelins' nudist colony: "One night I went out to a party there: grass, champagne, and slightly fleshy women in their late 30s who were very ready to take off all their clothing and drag anybody away into a series of nest bunks at the back." [4]

Happening 44 was a once-a-week night in what was essentially a Soho strip club/clip joint at 44 Gerrard Street. In an early 1950s incarnation it had been home to the West End Jazz Club, where George Melly and Mick Mulligan's Magnolia Jazz Band would play frenetic all-night sessions (for which Mulligan is said to have coined the term "all-night rave"). Its history mirroring post-war musical trends, 44 Gerrard Street had later housed a folk club, The Good Earth, and then, a skiffle club.

But in 1967, Happening 44 was happening. It had its own regular house band – Mick Farren's Social Deviants. Farren describes the place as "one of the weirdest hippie dungeons ever." [5] Its back room was filled with cans of old porn flicks and bondage equipment. Working girls from other establishments would pop in to enjoy the far-out sounds, and would sometimes join in and dance on stage with the Deviants – the equivalent, Farren notes, of jazz musicians' tradition of sitting in with the house band. As well as the Deviants, Syd Barrett-era Pink Floyd, Soft Machine and Fairport Convention played at Happening 44.

Noting yet another accidental meeting of two separate subcultures, Farren recalls members of the notorious South London Richardson gang turning up at Happening 44, thinking it was just a typical late night Soho drinking club. They were, he says, "totally bemused by the lights and the Deviants doing some impromptu fucked-up shaman ritual on the stage. Fortunately a bottle was always at hand to keep them happy." [6] This collision of underworld and underground seems typical of the 1960s, and was immortalised in Nic Roeg and Donald Cammell's 1968 film *Performance* (Cammell himself was no stranger to the occult, as his father Charles had been a friend of Crowley's).

Working girls would pop in to enjoy the far-out sounds

Perhaps the Sixties underground's success was due in part to its ability to absorb and utilise these disparate influences from discrete scenes. Another pioneering light show, Mark Boyle & Joan Hills's Sensual Laboratory, had its origins in the avant-garde art world rather than that of music. Using projectors, their liquid light shows employed chemicals, slides, bodily fluids and insects and the live experimentation aspect brought a very real danger to the performances, Boyle's hands often being burned by acids (not the lysergic kind).

Later on, but remaining firmly in the avant-garde, Boyle and Hills found success with earth art/land art pieces, such as their 'Earthprobe' project.

One unusual aspect of the Bracelins' involvement in the scene was their relatively senior age, just as much as their naturist and witchcraft background. A final thought: it has been argued that Crowley – who met Gardner in the last year of his life, 1947 – saw Gardner's Wicca as the best way to promote his Thelemic philosophy to a wider audience, and, it's claimed, helped write some of Gardner's rituals to this end. One could regard Bracelin's involvement in the psychedelic underground in a similar light – seeing this mass youth movement as the most effective means to spread the Wiccan doctrine (perhaps as a 'Trojan Horse' strategy). If so, might one regard 21st century Britain's relative acceptance and tolerance of witchcraft and magic(k) as evidence of his success? FT

With thanks to Andy Roberts and Gregg Hermetech.

NOTES

[1] Maxine Sanders, *Maxine: the Witch Queen*, Wyndham Publications, 1976, p82.

[2] Ibid, pp84-85.

[3] Frederic Lamond, *Fifty Years of Wicca*, Green Magic, 2004 p37.

[4] Jonathon Green, *Days In The Life: Voices from the English Underground, 1961-1971*, Minerva, 1989, p136.

[5] Mick Farren, *Give the Anarchist a Cigarette*, Jonathan Cape, 2001, p135.

[6] Ibid.

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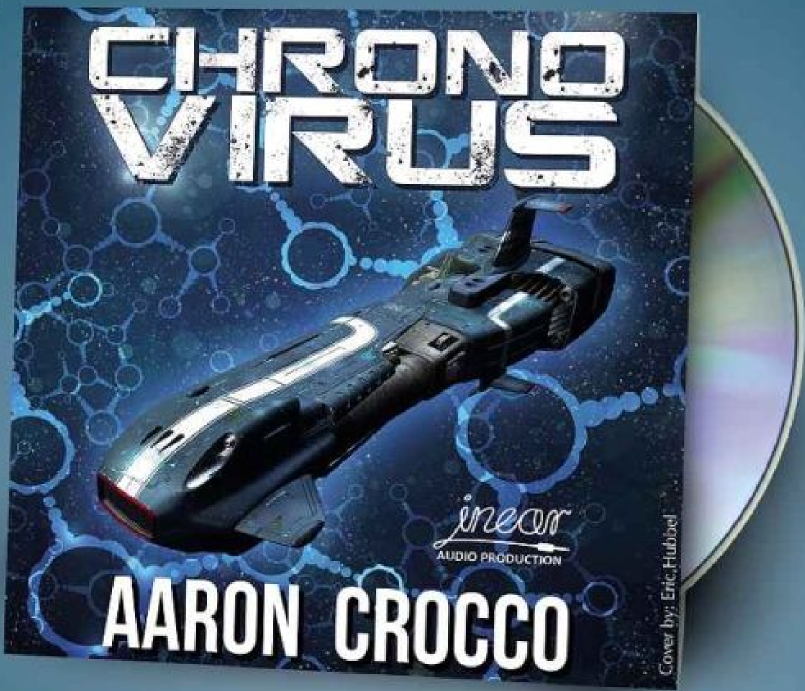

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A crypto-comedy of errors

The body of a hairy man found bobbing in the Bering Sea (or was it from Asia?) turns up as a sideshow exhibit then disappears and is replaced by a model and rancour...

Neanderthal

The Strange Saga of the Minnesota Iceman

Bernard Heuvelmans

Anomalist Books 2016

Pb, 277pp, refs, illus, appx, £15.95, ISBN 9781938398612

In one way, the Minnesota Iceman episode is the Roswell incident of cryptozoology: a glimpse of what at first seemed proof of an extraordinary anomaly before the evidence was snatched away, to fade into secrecy, confusion, and endless dispute.

With Roswell, however, the (by now mangled and contradictory) testimony bearing on the case didn't get to researchers, too many of whom turned out to be less than able, till three decades later.

With the Minnesota Iceman, the ostensible evidence's existence was known and studied almost immediately by zoologists. They concluded that the body encased in ice was of a recently slain hairy man with pre-modern characteristics. A complex of circumstances conspired to frustrate any hope of establishing anything one way or another.

Of course, as many readers know, the zoologists were Ivan T Sanderson and Bernard Heuvelmans. In 1968, the Belgian–French Heuvelmans happened to be visiting Sanderson's New Jersey farm. They shared an interest in cryptozoology, a field Heuvelmans created in its modern incarnation. Heuvelmans's adventurous curiosity sometimes bumped up against the boundaries of the scientific mainstream but did not entirely cross them; unknown animals, after all, remained animals in the ordinarily understood sense.

On the other hand, lifelong fortean and flamboyant personality Sanderson had already written books that featured UFOs, teleportation, poltergeists, and underwater civilisations. Even so, there was no disputing Sanderson's impressive scientific education and his wide field experience of the animal world.

The story began when Terry Cullen, operator of a vivarium in Milwaukee, called Sanderson to report something he had stumbled into one day in August 1967 while attending the Wisconsin State Fair, namely a sideshow featuring the supposed frozen body of a humanlike but not quite *Homo sapiens* figure, the victim to all appearances of gun violence. Cullen added that a friend had viewed it in Chicago only three days before his phone call (made on 9 December 1968).

Cullen, who possessed an undergraduate education in biology, had examined the Iceman and judged it to be a once-living creature, not a model. He was told that a Soviet trawler had found it floating in the Bering Sea. Confiscated in Hong Kong, it vanished for a few months before reappearing in the American Midwest.

With Cullen's help, Sanderson located the exhibitor, Frank D Hansen of Rollingstone, Minnesota, and arranged to meet him. Sanderson and Heuvelmans spent two days in Hansen's garage photographing, sketching and analysing what they could see through the ice. They even smelled its decaying flesh, they claimed.

> "Terry Cullen was told a Soviet trawler had found the Iceman floating in the Bering Sea"

They emerged convinced that the Minnesota Iceman was real, even though Hansen himself offered them no encouragement: he didn't deny it, but he dissembled, contradicted himself almost from sentence to sentence, and insisted – strangely for a man trying to profit from exhibitions of the alleged find – that he had no interest in publicity.

It was the beginning of a nightmare that would roll on over several years after the original alleged corpse disappeared and was replaced by a model apparently created in Hollywood by special-effects masters.

Virtually the only thing everybody would agree on is that the Minnesota Iceman that survives as an exhibit in marginal venues is different from the first one. Before the event had reached its sorry climax, however, the Smithsonian Institution, the FBI, and a few evolutionary scientists (including the then-famous Carleton Coon) expressed open-mindedness about its authenticity on the authority of Heuvelmans's photos, notes and scientific papers.

One theme in Hansen's evolving narrative (which had, admittedly, multiple origin stories) held that the true owner, a wealthy collector of curios, had picked up the Ice Man in Asia. Hansen would sometimes assert that the man, wishing no attention, forbade further scrutiny of the supposed body; moreover, he refused to sell it so that others could determine its true nature.

From what they had seen at length and at close range, Sanderson and Heuvelmans swore to the end of their days – the former died in 1973, the latter in 2001 – that it was a biological entity. They insisted that the first specimen was too complex, intricately detailed, and biologically sophisticated to have been hoaxed. Not to mention smelly.

Neanderthal is the first English translation of a 1974 French-language, book-length treatment by Heuvelmans. Cryptozoologists and others intrigued by this bizarre episode will welcome its publication, in a translation by Canadian marine biologist Paul LeBlond. It outlines what the initial excitement was about even as it fails to lay the affair to rest. Obviously, it will never be resolved unless the original body/model resurfaces, which at this late date seems unlikely – though I suppose not impossible.

Even the most sympathetic reader will wonder how, if the specimen is genuine, it had the misfortune to show up under lurid and impossible circumstances. One doesn't have to question the expertise or judgment of either Heuvelmans or Sanderson to wonder further why, moreover, only one such specimen has come

Continued on page 60

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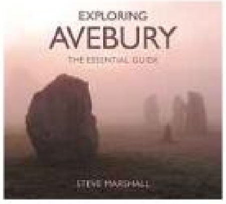
A minutely detailed study of 10 square miles around Avebury may be the only book you need about its Neolithic sites



Exploring Avebury

The Essential Guide

Steve Marshall

The History Press 2016
Pb, 140pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780750967662

This handsome guide to Avebury's Neolithic stone circles, standing stones and earthen monuments is illustrated with superb photographs and maps of the core complex and surrounding sites, all laced together with informed and well written text. It covers the henge, plus the surrounding monuments and features in the core area of the complex – the West Kennet and Beckhampton avenues, Windmill Hill, the Sanctuary, Silbury Hill, West Kennet Long Barrow. It includes features and sites further out in a 10-mile square around the core complex. There are superb graphics and plans.

Marshall's study of what he calls 'Avebury's Waterscape" evinces a breathtaking knowledge of the ancient streams and springs of the Avebury landscape. And his knowledge of the sarsen stones forming the megalithic monuments is equally impressive. He explains how sarsens were formed, discusses (and illustrates) *polissoirs* – stones with smooth hollows caused by the polishing of prehistoric stone axes – and explains other curious markings on the stones. He discusses sourcing possibilities for the monument stones and describes how close analysis reveals differing tints in various sarsens. 'Blue', 'pink and 'orange' stones occur in groups within the henge and along the West Kennet Avenue.

There is one place where Marshall misses a trick. He describes how the great Neolithic mound of Silbury Hill reached its present height (31m/102ft), but why did its builders stop at that height and why construct a tall monument in one of the lowest places in the landscape? In a 1991 paper, [1] I offered some answers. The profile of Silbury Hill appears visually bisected between its summit and a structural ledge [2] a few metres below it by the far horizon when viewed from any of the encircling major monuments – West Kennet Long Barrow (WKLB), East Kennet Long Barrow, the Sanctuary, from within Avebury Henge itself (the sightline only disappears or minimises when an intervening cereal crop reaches harvest height), and the Beckhampton long barrow. These sightlines are unlikely to be coincidental. The one from WKLB toward Silbury is so precise that it works only if viewed from the barrow's western tip, and that location only exists because WKLB was extended long after the main part had been constructed. Furthermore, the skyline that bisects the Silbury profile along this sightline is formed by Windmill Hill.

Other potentially significant observations also relate to the summit-ledge segment of Silbury Hill. During periods around May Day and August Harvest (Christian Lammas, pagan Lughnasadh) festivals, an observer on the summit of Silbury [3] would see the Sun rise over the distant eastern horizon, and by moving down to the ledge would see it rise again a few minutes later over the adjacent ridge of Waden Hill. At these times Silbury Hill throws a long shadow westwards, from which an optical effect, a 'glory', caused by refraction in dewdrops, throws a swathe of golden light across the fields. Even if this was not an intentionally engineered effect by Silbury's builders, it certainly would have been noticed and probably venerated.

Photographs of all these factors, even the 'glory', exist, and would have added to the guide's sumptuousness. A useful photographic innovation in the book is the use of scaled linear 'roll-outs' of stone circles in the henge, along the passage of WKLB, and elsewhere. Marshall also provides annotated viewscapes from key points. Best of all is his treatment of the crop marks that are all that remain of what had been huge and mysterious timber structures now known as the West Kennet Palisades south of the henge: he helpfully superimposes the crop marks onto oblique photographs of the fields involved.

Marshall touches on many other aspects, such as possible astronomical effects and, especially, his own acoustics work at WKLB [4] and his involvement in acoustics experiments at Longstones Cove. The book is an unmatched guide to Avebury, and much more than the superficiality that the term 'guide' implies. Highly recommended.

Paul Devereux

Notes

1 Devereux, P. 1991. "Three-dimensional aspects of apparent relationships between selected natural and artificial features within the topography of the Avebury Complex", *Antiquity* vol.65, no. 249.

2 This ledge is original and structural, but is thought to have been re-cut during mediæval fortification work. The flatness of the summit is also probably due to similar activity.

3 Climbing the Hill is now not allowed.

4 Fully described in his paper in *Time & Mind*, March 2016, pp43–56.

Fortean Times Verdict

EXEMPLARY GUIDE TO AVEBURY'S CORE AND SURROUNDING SITES **9**

Continued from previous page

to light. Surely, others should have emerged, and in more scientifically congenial contexts.

Whatever else this book may be, this is the stuff of a potential comic novel.

The central character would be a congenital liar like Hansen, able to subvert the minds of otherwise honest inquirers and corrupt them as he did Sanderson, who went on to aid and abet a subsequent Hansen fabrication in the hope – failed, naturally – of salvaging the Larger Truth. Sanderson and Heuvelmans's friendship turned out to be one more casualty of the Minnesota Iceman.

Or maybe this is all less cryptozoological than fortean, the sort of quasi-hallucinatory episode that plays out in a wilderness of mirrors through which those who enter – hardy anomalists who fear no ambiguity – are content to wander in amusement and delight.

For entirely understandable reasons Heuvelmans was not one of these. On the contrary, the experience forever frustrated and embittered him.

In common with his jeering critics, he anticipated certainty at the end of the quest. And as we should know by now, nobody gets that.

Jerome Clark

Fortean Times Verdict

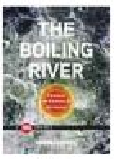
ONE FOR THE ANCIENT ALIEN BELIEVERS AND SCOFFERS ALIKE **6**

The Boiling River

Adventure and Discovery in the Amazon

Andrés Ruzo

TED Books 2016
Hb, 119pp, ISBN 9781471151583



Google Earth is a fascinating way to explore the planet. I remember introducing a couple of geologists to it, and they were astounded at how useful it was.

It has often occurred to me to wonder what fortean discoveries could be made with it, by looking at inaccessible parts of the world. Well, I have now found one fortean site visible on Google Earth.

Ancient Inca legends speak of a boiling river somewhere in the jungle of the upper Amazon basin (along with the obligatory city of gold). Hot streams are not unknown in volcanic regions, but there are no volcanos in the Amazon, so the legend must be fantasy – or is it? Point Google Earth to 8.81 S 74.72 W, and you will see something labelled "Agua Caliente" – hot water. Admittedly, from satellite imagery you can't tell it's boiling, but you can click on images and see photos of the river with steam coming off it. No, it's not morning mist – it really is scalding steam.

Or you can read Andrés Ruzo's account of it, in a pocket-size book published by TED. It is a written version of a TED talk given by the author (available at the TED website) and won't take long to read. Think of it as an extended 'Fortean Traveller' column.

The author is a young Peruvian geophysicist who became obsessed with the boiling river legend while working on a geothermal map of Peru. The book recounts how he tracked it down, and describes not only his scientific investigation of the river, but the river's shamanistic significance. The author is good on conveying what it is like to do science, but is also to be commended on his open-minded approach to the local shamanism. He also makes an interesting discovery about legends of fabulous gold. And there are some nice photos, all in colour.

Demerits: the shortness of it, imposed by the format, means that some stuff gets left out. I would have liked a bit more of the science. Also, the author's relentless use of the present tense throughout is a bit wearing. But this little book would make a nice stocking-filler, and it really is rather awesome that there is such a thing as a boiling river. Not just a little stream – a river as wide as a road, and it really is boiling.

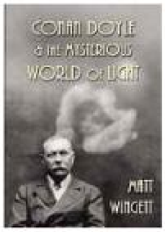
Roger Musson

Fortean Times Verdict

HOT STUFF – A RIVER THAT BOILS. NOT ENOUGH SCIENCE THOUGH **8**

More heat than light

A ring-side seat for Conan Doyle's fight to convince his opponents of the spiritualist case for survival after death



Conan Doyle & The Mysterious World of Light

1887–1920

Matt Wingett

Life is Amazing 2016
Pb, 322pp, ind, appxs, £12.99, ISBN 9780957241350

Ever since his death in 1930, many people have wondered just how Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of the supreme detective in literature, could have believed the most extraordinary spiritualist manifestations and endorsed the infamous 'Cottingley Fairy' photographs as genuine.

In this book, Matt Wingett traces how Conan Doyle became convinced of the existence of a spiritual – and specifically spiritualist – realm, starting from a materialist position in his younger days and emerging as the greatest champion and propagandist that the spiritualist movement ever possessed.

Though Doyle's contribution to spiritualist literature was relatively slight, his influence in public arguments over the faith was – for a period – huge. Drawing particularly on Doyle's contributions to the world's oldest spiritualist journal *Light* magazine (now in its 132nd year), Wingett does a valuable service for scholars and historians by reproducing every article and letter that Doyle wrote for the publication between 1887 and 1920. But he also goes further in examining the impact that Doyle made and the controversies which erupted as he set forth to convince the world of the spiritualist case for survival after death.

Doyle debated and clashed with many opponents ranging from materialist sceptics to representatives of many of the established churches. Some Christians welcomed spiritualism but many others maintained a tradition of ardent opposition dating back to the mid-19th century, working to extinguish the movement as a dangerous rival.

Particularly interesting is the book's rediscovery of two of Doyle's unjustly forgotten opponents who engaged Doyle in lengthy bouts of argument. (Interestingly, all three shared a common background in Roman Catholicism). In the red corner was the former Catholic priest turned champion of atheism, Joseph McCabe, a founder of the Rationalist Press Association who boasted of having written more than any living human being in his battle against God and the supernatural. Pitching in from the blue corner, Doyle was attacked by the foaming Jesuit Father Bernard Vaughan, who denounced spiritualism as a snare set by the Devil himself. Their gladiatorial debates in the press and on public platforms generated a great deal more heat than light (no pun intended) and with the result one finds oneself thinking of the Monty Python sketch of a theological debate over the existence of God being settled by a wrestling match (God exists by two falls to a submission).

The colossal death toll of the Great War ensured huge and receptive audiences, with thousands flocking to meetings at which Doyle debated and preached. Both the debaters and the audiences showed huge stamina for these contests but none ever succeeded in a knock-out blow to the other party. Within them can be seen the same moves, counters and evasions which characterise such believer versus sceptic arguments today. Wingett duly provides a ring-side seat to these and numerous other clashes; and by way of intervals between rounds, he reproduces a number of fascinating examples of ghostly phenomena also reported in *Light* and other publications of the day.

After leading us through Doyle's writings for *Light*, Wingett summarises the final portion of Doyle's career as a spiritualist champion up to his death; it is pleasing to learn that the author is planning two further volumes covering this, which will feature the Cottingley fairies, Houdini and the Crewe Circle of spiritualists.

Currently, the author leaves hanging the question of how Doyle could create the world's most rational detective and yet simultaneously embrace belief in incredible phenomena.

I would venture that it is surely to make a category error to assume the mind of Doyle must have equated with that of his fictional creation. Doyle was no more Sherlock Holmes than Ian Fleming was James Bond or Edgar Rice Burroughs was Tarzan. In my view, Doyle was far closer in personality to an earlier campaigning journalist and spiritualist champion, WT Stead (1849–1912), whom Lord Milner described as a combination of "Don Quixote, Phineas T Barnum and the Apostle Paul." But we shall have to see what future volumes reveal.

In the meantime, we can but regret the absence of such mighty figures today and reflect upon how feeble and diminished modern public discourse seems by comparison.

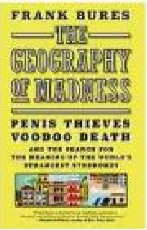
Alan Murdie

Fortean Times Verdict

THE SPIRITUALIST CASE IN DETAIL FOR SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH **9**

Family jewels

Penis thieves – human and vulpine – and other biocultural panics cleverly laid bare



The Geography of Madness

Penis Thieves, Voodoo Death and the Search for the Meaning of the World's Strangest Syndromes

Frank Bures

Melville House 2016

Hb, pp246, notes, US$25.95, ISBN 9781612193724

FT has monitored waves of penis theft scarelore, mostly in West Africa, since 1990 [**FT56:33**]. Rumour had it that evil wizards could steal a man's private parts, often by merely touching him on a bus. Those accused of such thefts are often attacked or killed by an angry mob. A related rumour claims the missing tackle materialises in the witchcraft market as *muti*. The rumour was first noted in the Sudan in the 1960s, followed by a Nigerian epidemic in 1977–79.

Bures starts his investigation – part travelogue, part treatise – in Alagbado, a dangerous slum on the outer reaches of Lagos, where a victim was reported to live.

Penis theft anxiety has a longer and wider history than one might suppose. In China the Yellow Emperor's *Nei Ching* (*Classic Text of Internal Medicine*) (400–100 BC) describes the mortal dangers of *suo yang* or "shrinking penis", a syndrome still appearing in 20th century Chinese medical textbooks; while in Europe the 15th century *Malleus Maleficarum* warned that a witch could cause one's *membrum virile* to vanish. In 1874 Dutchman Benjamin Matthes was compiling a dictionary of Buginese (the language spoken on Sulawesi in what is now Indonesia) when he came across the term *lasa koro* ("shrinking of the penis"), a disease that he said was not uncommon among locals and "must be very dangerous". There were large-scale epidemics in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s in Singapore, Thailand, and India. The biggest took place on Hainan island, southern China, in 1984–85: a fox spirit was said to be stealing genitals from thousands of men while they lay in bed. Bures describes his investigation on this strangely isolated island.

Other culture-bound syndromes include *latah* in Malaysia, where a sudden fright puts victims in a trance, during which they are compelled to imitate the words and actions of those around them; and *taijin kyofusho* in Japan, where the afflicted have a terrifying fear of other people's embarrassment (not their own). Cambodians can suffer from *khyal cap* or "wind attacks" in which *khyal*, a wind-like substance believed to flow alongside blood, rushes to the head and causes dizziness, numbness, fever – you name it. I'll resist the strong temptation to enumerate other strange fears from around the world.

Bures usefully demolishes the smug assumption that the modern West (with its mechanistic model of the body) is free of culture-bound syndromes – consider anorexia, pet hoarding, and Truman syndrome. Some are virtually confined to one country, like *Herzinsuffizienz* ("heart insufficiency") in Germany, or "chilblains" in England; others have come and gone, like "scriveners' palsy" in the early 19th century. All these syndromes are biocultural, not merely biological – which is not to say they are in any sense "unreal".

Paul Sieveking

Fortean Times Verdict

HOW CULTURE CAN INFLUENCE MEDICAL SYMPTOMS **8**

The Age of Lovecraft

Carl H Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock

University of Minnesota Press 2016

Pb, 256pp, illus, bib, ind, $24.95 / £17.23, ISBN 9780816699254

The last 20 years or so have seen a revolution in the critical perception of HP Lovecraft.

Once a cult author whose work was well outside the critical mainstream, Lovecraft has started to turn up in the unlikeliest of places. His work is now acknowledged as an influence by novelists and filmmakers and he is included in the pantheon of 20th-century American writers. Literary respectability has belatedly arrived with inclusion in the Library of America and Penguin Modern Classics series.

But Lovecraft's influence has spread even beyond the literary field; he's been adopted by philosophers, especially speculative realists like Graham Harman, who used Lovecraft as an example of "object-oriented ontology" in his book *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (Zero Books 2012).

Amid all this, of course, philosophers, critics and fans have all had to grapple with other aspects of Lovecraft's work, most notably his deeply-held racist beliefs.

With all this critical and mainstream attention being paid to Lovecraft, editors Sederholm and Weinstock ask: why Lovecraft? And why now?

At least, that's what the back cover of *The Age of Lovecraft* asks, but the book doesn't attempt to provide a definitive answer. Instead, it's a collection of scholarly articles approaching Lovecraft from a variety of perspectives, including race, sex, ethics, geography, music, the history and nature of fan fiction, anthropology, psychology and film studies.

All of this concludes with an interview with author China Miéville. British horror legend Ramsey Campbell turns in a brief appreciation of Lovecraft as a foreword.

Like any collection of academic articles, *The Age of Lovecraft* is a mixed bag. It wouldn't be at all appealing to someone only casually familiar with Lovecraft, and yet its nature means that it frequently repeats very basic biographical or literary details. The same nature, for instance, means that there's likely to be something here for anyone interested in Lovecraft.

If you don't care at all about speculative realism, you may still find W Scott Poole's article on "witch-cults" in Lovecraft informative, or appreciate Weinstock's piece on things – portraits, books and buildings – in Lovecraft's fiction.

The Age of Lovecraft is also an interesting look at the contemporary debates around Lovecraft; several papers deal with the difficult issue of Lovecraft's racism, and authors vary from enthusiastic to sceptical about Lovecraft's adoption by philosophers and about the claims made by some of his interpreters.

The volume is a fascinating look at different aspects of Lovecraft's writing – and, perhaps more interestingly, at the ways in which modern academics have used and interpreted his writing. It doesn't provide much of an answer to the question "why Lovecraft? Why now?" unless that answer is that changes in society over the intervening decades mean that Lovecraft now provides more fertile ground for reinterpretation.

Alternatively, it could just be, as Miéville suggests, that a generation of young Lovecraft fans are now old enough to be writing and editing academic volumes about a favourite writer.

There's something to interest anyone who takes a serious interest in Lovecraft in *The Age of Lovecraft* – but, as with any edited volume, what interests one reader might not interest another.

An excellent read for the committed Lovecraft scholar, but less devoted fans will have to judge it based on their specific interests.

James Holloway

Fortean Times Verdict

SOMETHING FOR ALL LOVECRAFT FANS, AND LOTS FOR DEVOTEES **9**

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

The Children of Roswell

Thomas J Carey & Donald R Schmitt

New Page Books 2016

PB, 255pp, notes, bib, index, $16.99. ISBN 9781632650191

Ufologists Schmitt and Carey have years of serious investigations – and a shelfload of books – behind them. This is not the usual rehash of the convoluted mystery of the alleged 1947 crash in the New Mexico desert of an alien craft. Instead, the pair focus on the people who believed they saw the wreckage or an alien body, the military's attempts to cover up the incident, and those who consistently claimed that government agents threatened 'reprisals'. The son of a witness disappeared in 1960; the daughter of another had her phone tapped; and the son of an intelligence officer was subject to 'mind control' pressure. Even the authors describe years of "abuse and surveillance". We hear a lot about 'targeted individuals' who believe they are being harassed by sinister forces. Here, it is within the context of ufology.

Afterlife

A History of Life after Death

Philip C Almond

IB Taurus 2016

Pb, 236pp, £25.00, ISBN 9781784534967

Not another tome on NDEs (etc), but on the conceptions and expectations of the Afterlife in different times and cultures. Almond – a professor of religion – devotes the greater part of his study to analysing the complicated morass that comprises the Christian view of the next stage of a soul's journey, from the earliest, simplistic concepts, through all the mediæval schismatic and sectish variations with their Hells of punishment, right up to modern New Age – almost pagan or Theosophical – imaginings. In contrast, the imagined Afterlife of the Greeks and Romans and other primal cultures is rich in models of mythical aspiration and geography. The equivalents from oriental and archaic religious systems, including shamanism, alas, do not get the comparable treatment here, though in the final chapter, non-Christian ideas of the soul and its progression are shown to influence European theologies. Nevertheless, this is a valuable resource for understanding the Western religious imperative.

Unwelcomed

The True Story of the Moffitt Family Haunting

Deborah Moffitt

Unwelcomed.com 2015

PB $16.99, illus, ISBN 9780990304920

Between 1987 and 1992, the Moffitt family endured a prolonged and at times violent haunting of their home at Rancho Cucamonga, at the foot of Mt Baldy in southern California. Deborah Moffitt's account details, earnestly, the messages inscribes on walls and mirrors, the symbols carved into surfaces and the bedding slashed while sleepers slept on unaware, and many other 'pranks' from simple nuisances to the disturbing 'possessions' of her father-in-law. It's not going to convince 'skeptics' as it's all circumstantial ... but it does give us some insight into the plight of a frightened family and the people they turn to for help. Many of these were self-professed spiritualists, exorcists and paranormal investigators ... and top of the list were the notorious 'demonologists' Ed and Lorraine Warren, who have made a business massaging their 'investigations' into B-grade horror movies.

The Indus

Andrew Robinson

Reaktion Books 2015

Hb, 208pp, illus, refs, bib, ind, £15.00, ISBN 9781162055421O

In 326 BC, when Alexander the Great yomped his army up the valley of the Indus River in northwest India, he was wholly unaware that he was trampling over the remains of an enigmatic civilization, comparable with those of Egypt or Mesopotamia, that had flourished there for more than half a millennium, and which declined and vanished just as Egypt and Mesopotamia began their ascendency. It was not until the 1920s that, beneath nearly 4,000 years of dust, the remains of that Harappian civilization were unearthed to the astonishment of archaeologists. It once spread over large parts of what is now India and Pakistan with nearly 1,000 settlements and two cities, Harappa and Mohenjo-daro (now a World Heritage site). The culture – which featured a balance of art and technology and, surprisingly, seems to have had no armies or warfare – is considered to be the origins of Indian civilization and possibly even Hinduism. Robinson's detailed, yet gripping and clear, portrait of this important cultural ancestor is highly recommended.

Monsters of New York

Bruce G Hallenbeck

Stackpole Books 2014

Pb, 135pp, bib, $12.95. ISBN 9780811712132

Monsters of North Carolina

John Hairr

Stackpole Books 2014

Pb, 123pp, bib, $12.95.ISBN 9780811712040

Monsters of Massachusetts

Loren Coleman

Stackpole Books 2014

Pb, 115pp, $12.95. ISBN 9780811708111

Bigfoot features prolifically in these summary surveys of US states and their fortean wildlife, but lake monsters, sea monsters, vampires, mermaids, small humanoids, giant insects and out-of-place alligators, to name just a few, also get a look-in. While the general focus is on cryptozoology, the authors, inevitably, are lured, in places, off the beaten path into the swirling mists inhabited by more supernatural critters. Each author is an expert in his subject matter and the landscape of his region, which he sets out concisely. They bring to nine the number of single state guides by Stackpole; a series that can be recommended to younger readers.

Induced After Death Communication

Allan L Botkin

Hampton Roads 2014

Pb, 232pp, bib, $18.95. ISBN 9781571747129

Not, as might appear at first glance, a new way of communicating with the dead, but a careful account of a new technique of grief counselling. Botkin is a clinical psychologist who treats traumatised veterans and began testing 'eye-movement desensitisation', which seems to 're-process' thoughts and emotions, as a way of accessing 'core grief'. He tells of Victor, a Vietnam vet who was traumatised when a young friend was shot in front of him. After a session, Botkin says Victor became calm, smiling – ecstatic, even. Botkin replicated the technique with other vets with equal success until he had treated hundreds of patients; each time, the patient experienced an encounter with the deceased object of their grief, and each time, Botkin says, the intimate reconciliation or resolution "reversed the sadness in which [they were] immersed", bypassing months of conventional grief therapy. Now Botkin – who claims the method has a significantly different neurological action to hypnosis – teaches it to other doctors and counsellors. *Life after Death* author Raymond Moody, in the introduction, praises Botkin for carefully avoiding presentation of his work "as scientific evidence of life after death". The CSICOPS may froth at all this, but here is an experienced clinician regularly demonstrating a technique that resolves traumatic stress disorders, during which something remarkable passes between the patient and his traumatic memories in a subjective encounter.

No wonder there is growing interest in the technique by leading NDE researchers. Could be a very important study.

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS, BLU-RAYS AND GAMES TO:
FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD.

Houdini & Doyle

Created by David Hoselton and David Titchers, UK 2016
ITV Studios, £19.99 (DVD)

Houdini & Doyle is a very odd concoction. Arch-sceptic escapologist Harry Houdini and supernatural-believer and Sherlock Holmes writer Arthur Conan Doyle team up with a winsome but feisty "woman policeman" (yes, that's how she describes herself) to solve a series of crimes that have Scotland Yard baffled.

In real life, Houdini and Doyle were friends – though much later than the 1901 setting of this series – but they fell out very badly over their different attitudes to the supernatural. Here, they are constantly disagreeing, but good-humouredly, placing bets on the supernatural or prosaic causes of the strange occurrences they are investigating.

Stephen Mangan (*Episodes, Green Wing, Dirk Gently* etc) plays the somewhat stolid Doyle, deeply troubled by his beloved wife Touie (played by Mangan's wife Louise Delamere) lying in a nursing home dying of TB; he wants assurance that she will live on after her inevitable death. (Doyle's real-life relationship at the time with the woman who would become his second wife is not alluded to.) His distant attitude to his young children is shown quite unsympathetically. Mangan doesn't attempt Doyle's Scottish accent – but the bushy moustache is his own, grown especially for the series.

Michael Weston (Lucas Douglas in *House*) is the really rather irritating Houdini – a smooth, arrogant and stereotypically pushy American showman. He is determined to prove that everything that seems supernatural isn't. And he's fairly clumsily pursuing the third leg of this unlikely tripod.

Constable Adelaide Stratton could be the launch of little-known Canadian actress Rebecca Liddiard's career; she steals the show in many scenes. Again, historical liberties are taken; there weren't actually any women in the police force in Britain until 1914, 13 years later. Constable Stratton spends much of her time being the voice of common sense while the two men are butting heads – but she has her own secrets, which come centre stage by the end of the series.

Her boss, Chief Inspector Horace Merring, is a recurrent but minor role for Tim McInnerny (*Blackadder* and much else), initially dismissive but eventually realising (though scarcely admitting) the value of the young woman policeman.

The series starts with a murder in one of the infamous Magdalene laundries, where wayward young women work long hours for the good of their souls; the catch is that the murderer, seen by one of the nuns, had died six months earlier. There's an episode about a faith-healer who curses a critic, who promptly dies; another about Spring-heeled Jack; one about a boy who claims to be the reincarnation of the murdered lover of a suffragette; a dodgy medium helping the police solve crimes; Bram Stoker involved in a real-life vampire mystery; Thomas Edison communicating with the dead through his necrophone; and even an alien abduction yarn. Good fortean themes all – or Edwardian X-Files.

Forget the historical inaccuracies. Forget the dialogue anachronisms (of which there are many). Forget Constable Stratton's sometimes laboured proto-feminist message. If you take the whole thing as something of a lark, despite its often dark themes, it works – just. The balance isn't quite right; those reviewers who panned it perhaps took it too seriously.

The first episode was broadcast on ITV1 in March 2016; all subsequent episodes were only shown on ITV Encore, a new pay channel which even Stephen Mangan said in an interview he'd never heard of. It showed, perhaps, a lack of confidence in the series by the network itself. As this review is written, there are unconfirmed reports that there will not be a second series because of poor viewing figures. But these may be more the fault of ITV than of *Houdini & Doyle* itself..
David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
FLAWED BUT FUN EDWARDIAN X-FILES **8**

Jekyll & Hyde

Dir various, UK 2015
ITV Studios Home Entertainment, £19.99 (DVD)

Ever since the return of *Doctor Who* over a decade ago, TV producers have been hunting for the next big fantasy weekend 'family drama'. Many pretenders have come and gone: *Robin Hood, Merlin, Primeval, Atlantis*...

ITV's much vaunted *Jekyll & Hyde* was the latest and, joining these others, Charlie Higson's 're-imagining' of the Robert Louis Stevenson source material, was also the latest in a line of failures.

Gothic horror characters seem to be all the rage at the moment, with *Penny Dreadful* reaching a third series and ITV reinventing Mary Shelley's finest in *The Frankenstein Chronicles* with Sean Bean. Higson's approach was to shift Jekyll to the 1930s and make the character more of a superhero than a monster. There is some merit in this, as the majority of the modern superheroes dominating cinemas every summer emerged from the 1930s and the comic book debuts of Superman (in 1938) and Batman (in 1939). This approach downplayed the monster inherent in Jekyll's alter-ego of Hyde (just as the *Beauty and the Beast* revival on The CW played down the beastlyness). Perhaps less sure was the move to make the current Jekyll (Tom Bateman) a descendent of the original, battling evil forces (named Tenebræ) and manipulated by an anti-monster police force (dubbed 'Military Intelligence: Other' or MIO), lead by an over-the-top Richard E Grant.

There was a problem of tone across the 10 episodes of the series. While Grant camped things up, and Christian McKay played likeable lawyer Maxwell Utterson as a bumbling fool (killing him off was a waste), the opening episode also attracted nearly 500 complaints to Ofcom over the level of violence in a 6.30pm show. The Paris attacks in the winter of 2015 saw an episode postponed as it featured a gun fight. Some of the creatures featured were laughable (the human-headed dog, the lobster claw guy, so called uber-villain 'Lord Trash'), while others were more effective (the Vetala ghouls, the giant leech-like Moroli). In many ways, the show aspired to the 'monster of the week' status of American hits like *The X-Files* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but its failure came down to that uncertain tone. It's as if the show didn't really know its audience: the 'family' crowd or monster movie fans?

A great cast – Donald Sumpter, Enzo Cilenti, Sinead Cusack, and Mark Bonnar among them – was arguably wasted on inadequate material. By the end, it also seemed that everyone featured was related in one way or another to everyone else, taking the Darth Vader/ Luke Skywalker trope to ludicrous extremes. Perhaps the breakout actor was Natalie Gumede, with this being her first series regular role outside of the soap *Coronation Street*. Her Bella Charming was a feisty foil for both Bateman's Jekyll and Hyde, holding her own against many more experienced actors. Bateman himself was fine, given what he had to work with – he at least had the superhero swirl of his long coat down pat!

So, what to make of this latest *Jekyll & Hyde*? It'd be something of a cliché to describe it as a split personality drama, but there seems no way to escape it. It's as if the show encapsulated within itself the very nature of Stevenson's characters, and in trying to be all things to all audiences, it has ended up fully satisfying none. It won't be back for a second series.

Brian J Robb

Fortean Times Verdict
FANTASY DRAMA OF TWO HALVES, NEITHER SATISFYING **6**

Penda's Fen

Dir Alan Clarke, UK 1990
BFI, £12.99 (Blu-ray) £9.99 (DVD)

In 1990, 16 years after *Penda's Fen* was first broadcast, director Alan Clarke was asked about it. "I had no idea what I was doing," he said. It has now been released on DVD for the first time as part of the British Film Institute's retrospective of Clarke's substantial array of work.

Penda's Fen is undefinable and almost indescribable. It's a 90-minute mood piece; there's little or no storyline. It's a sad comment on our cultural development that it wouldn't be commissioned, made or broadcast today.

It's set in Pinvin, a village in Worcestershire; Pinvin was formerly Pinfin, and before that (probably) Penda's Fen, named after the 7th-century Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia – the last great Pagan king in an increasingly Christian land.

Stephen (Spencer Banks – remember the speccy kid in *Timeslip*?) is an A-level student obsessed with the music of Edward Elgar, whose music is the play's soundtrack, and who appears in one dream/vision sequence. He's confused and troubled by his homosexual leanings; he's bullied by his schoolmates, who tie pink ribbons in his hair, but his adoptive parents seem surprised he's only just noticed his orientation.

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

This month, FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and rounds up a slew of recommended books on horror cinema.

SATAN'S BLADE

Dir L Scott Castillo Jr. Corman, US 1984
Arrow Video, £14.99 (Dual format)

RETURN OF THE KILLER TOMATOES

Dir John De Bello, US 1988
Arrow Video, £14.99 (Dual format)

This little seen slasher movie sees a group of young 'uns getting stuck on a mountain man's Satanic knife. The blade even glows, but only when it kills trees. The killer is an inhospitable jerk, stalking the lake and snowy hills of Big Bear, California, and slashing anyone who crosses 'his' land. To be fair though, the place is beautiful and worth protecting. Expect protracted scenes of characters padding through magical, snowy landscapes. The screaming stuff, though, mostly happens indoors – in two identical cabins, which are really not beautiful and more like something from a depressing Latvian porno movie.

The film's got a funny old rhythm. The action comes in fits and starts. There are long drawn-out scenes of relationship discussion, which are both boring and kind of sweet. Then, these bits of downtime are suddenly punctuated with blasts of cruel blood-letting.

Let me be clear: the acting in this is home-movie level – but for me, that puts it on the adorable side of awful. The gore is similarly home-brewed. Yet there's an earnestness about the whole thing that keeps you watching. And you'll probably do more watching than listening. Seriously. If you don't like sound effects, you've found your dream movie. There's barely any Foley work in this film. People crunch on snow; cars zoom along roads, but 'things' often make no sound at all. Plus, the dialogue uses really long gaps of silence. This lack of audio complexity makes for a weirdly hypnotic experience, which might explain why I actually rather enjoyed this movie despite its obvious and plentiful shortcomings.

Arrow present a slightly damaged but nice, sharp-looking HD print. You should click the full frame option. What you lose in filling the screen you'll gain in curtain rings and visible boom mikes. Don't expect the usual Arrow production values from the extras. Apart from a great commentary track, the supplements are ported from another release. These two interviews are some of the worst shot extras I've ever seen: the director says interesting stuff, but sits side-on and never looks at the camera. Still, at least we get to become very familiar with the interviewer's profile, as she sits in silence for almost 30 minutes. Again, I found the dodgy camerawork to be strangely fitting for *Satan's Blade* – a horror film that plays like a likeable sixth form school project. Oh, and there's a Kickstarter sequel in the works.

Also from Arrow comes *Return of the Killer Tomatoes*. As a teenager, I laughed out loud when I first saw this dumb, surreal comedy. I'm 41 now and watched it last night. I laughed even louder. It might lack the gag-a-minute hit rate of its main influence, *Airplane*, but it's got the same 'no-rules' sensibility. And when the jokes hit, they hit hard. A crazed scientist turns tomatoes into Rambo-esque killers and sexy assistants, so it's up to a pizza delivery guy and his sidekick (George Clooney, of all people) to save the day.

There are three more films in the *Killer Tomato* franchise (plus a TV series and videogames), but I'm guessing this initial entry might be the ripest and most satisfying of them all.

Fortean Times Verdict
TRASHY EIGHTIES TREASURES SPIFFED UP FOR HD VIEWING **6**

He has long philosophical and theological conversations with his parish priest father; how often do we hear Manichæism discussed in a TV play?

Manichæism is (at least in part) what Penda's Fen is all about: the reification of good and evil, the personification and polarisation of Christian and Pagan, of ancient and modern powers, of light and darkness, of strength and weakness. But do we have to go for one or the other? Isn't there a meeting place between the extremes?

Playwright David Rudkin, quoted in an excellent essay in the booklet, distances *Penda's Fen* from folklore and visionary landscapes, as it's often described. "It's a bloody political piece, he said. "I've always thought of myself as a political writer." It's also about prejudice and the hatred that comes from ignorance and fear; there's a thinly-disguised Mrs Whitehouse character.

Don't bother about the storyline. Don't try to make too much sense of it. Don't over-analyse it. Just immerse yourself in it. It's worth it. In mood, it's probably closest to the BBC dramatisation of Alan Garner's wonderful *Red Shift* – and that's high praise, for both of them.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
DARK, BROODING, AND ATMOSPHERIC: A CLASSIC **9**

Beowulf: Return to the Shieldlands

Dir various, UK 2016
ITV Studios, £14.99 (DVD)

With the enormous success of HBO's *Game of Thrones*, TV fantasy series have never had it so good. None of the various recent contenders have had the impact of *GoT*, never mind the budget. Blink and you may have missed *Legend of the Seeker* (based on Terry Goodkind's *Sword of Truth* books) or the YA-oriented *Shannara Chronicles*, based on Terry Brook's Tolkien-inspired *Shannara* series. Then there are series such as the History Channel's *Vikings* and *The Last Kingdom*, which dip their toes in the waters of the supernatural and fantastic while trading heavily on the core of treachery and summary brutality for which *GoT* has become so popular.

Scheduled pre-watershed on a Sunday evening, ITV's *Beowulf: Return to the Shieldlands* is a strange half-beast of a series that contains all of these elements but is master of none. Loosely based on the Anglo-Saxon epic, complete with Grendel lurking episodically (a sort of tall, muscular, pre-full body wax Gollum), its action is concerned as much with the squabbling for power on Beowulf's return to the town of Herot to say his farewell to his estranged surrogate father, as it is with cutting a would-be epic fantasy swathe. Having previously left on bad terms, Beowulf is not exactly welcomed by the dying Thane. As the episodes unfurl he battles to assert himself in the community. Meanwhile, there are trolls, invading tribes, female blacksmiths, a rocky romance and secret pasts to be explored.

There is a difference between playing with familiar genre tropes and that seen-it-all-before feeling. *Beowulf* falls into the latter category. George RR Martin, a writer of immense experience, overturns conventions masterfully, but *Beowulf* provides few new insights. The buddy banter between Kieran Bew's titular hero (who never convinces you he has done the grizzled warrior mileage; he certainly doesn't look as if he has) and Gísli Örn Garðarsson's anti-hero sidekick Breca is hardly belly laugh stuff, while palpably trying hard to be so. James Dormer who co-produced and had a big hand in the writing, is no stranger to bantering duos, having penned episodes of *Strike Back*, but unlike that sex-and-violence-fuelled Spec Ops romp, everything here is hamstrung by pre-watershed decorum, including the battles. In the last couple of episodes, revelations relating to Grendel lend proceedings an interesting bent – but by then it was all too late for the ratings-worshipping execs. Like many, I wanted to like *Beowulf* but found it hard to champion because all too often it simply disappointed, leaving the viewer painfully conscious of what it was trying to be – British TV aping American TV, with fewer extras and about a tenth of the budget – without ever asserting its own distinct identity.

Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict
THE EXPRESSION 'EPIC FAIL' SPRINGS TO MIND... **5**

SHORTS

THE FORGOTTEN

Metrodome, £7.99 (DVD)

Scary movies set on council estates seem to be in vogue at the moment. Here, a teenager called Tommy goes to stay in his dad's squalid apartment, while odd thumps and scrapes are heard from the adjoining flat. He joins forces with a girl from the estate and together they venture next door in search of answers. It's a quiet slice of horror, but that doesn't mean it's gentle. There's an emotional intensity that gives the thoughtful story real punch, not least in Clem Tibber's heart-breaking portrayal of Tommy. **Rev Peter Laws** 7/10

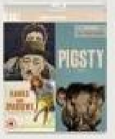
VISIONS

Lionsgate, £9.99 (DVD)

Home and Away star Isla Fisher moves to a new home, only to be plagued by supernatural visions. A hooded figure stands on a nearby hill, spectral pennies upend themselves on a table, and a local medium does the usual swivel-eyed collapse when she picks up on the malign forces at work. Is Fisher stressed by her pregnancy? Is she seeing genuine ghosts? Might it be something else entirely? This feels like a *Twilight Zone* episode stretched to feature length, but the story and conclusion is satisfying, particularly for forteans with an interest in 'place memories'. Plus, Q from *Star Trek: TNG* is in it (though without his funny chesspiece headgear, sadly). **PL** 6/10

HAWKS AND SPARROWS/PIGSTY

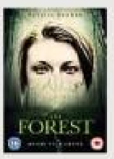
Eureka, £17.99 (Blu-ray)



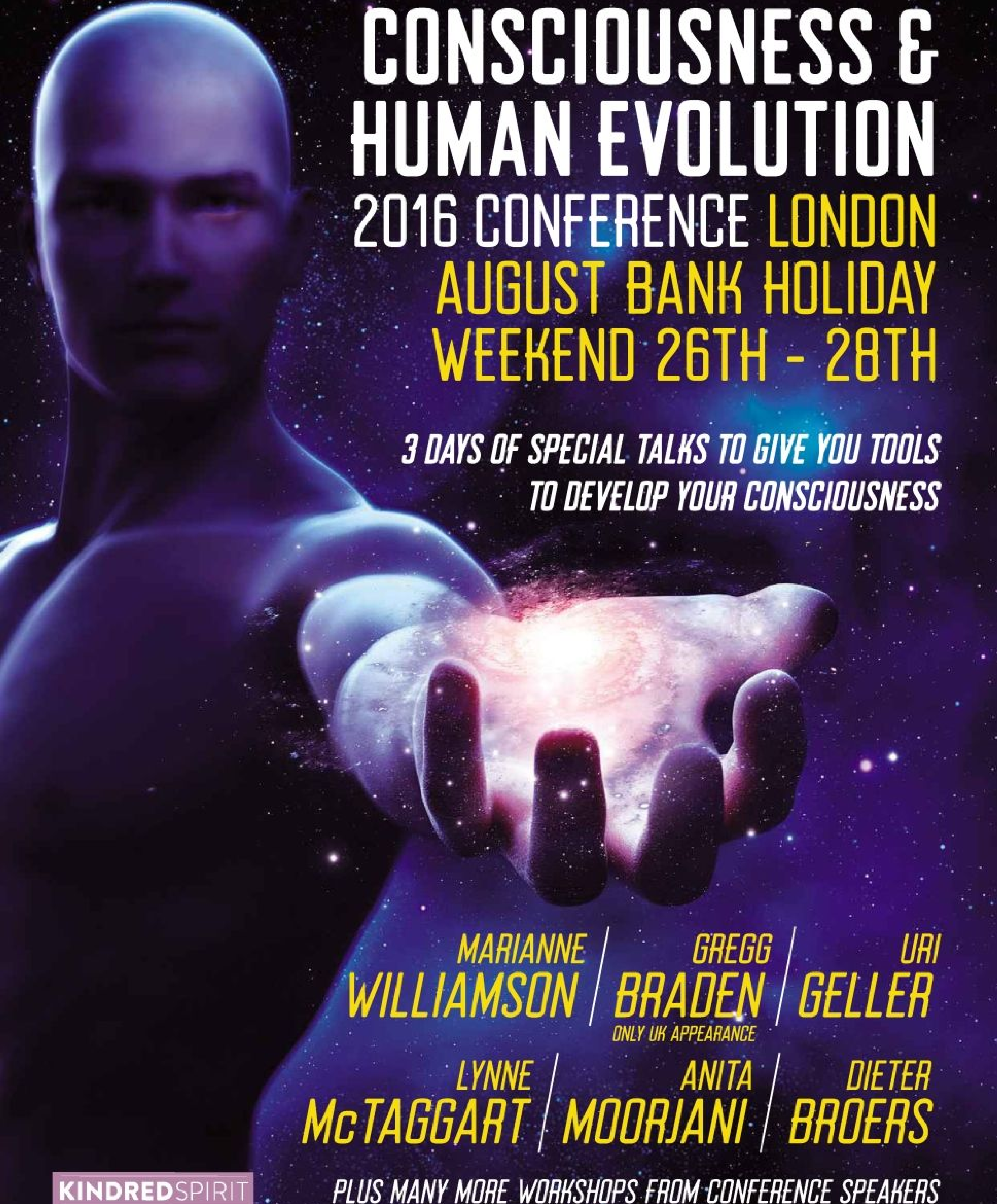
Two of Pasolini's lesser-known films in an excellent value double bill: what's not to like? Well, some might baulk at *Pigsty*, ("I killed my father. I ate human flesh and I quiver with joy") which intercuts visions of an ashen mediæval wasteland full of human sacrifice and cannibalism with a modern story of an unrepentant ex-Nazi industrialist and his porker-loving son, but rest assured it's a dazzlingly ambiguous thing of beauty in its own way. *Hawks and Sparrows* is a more family-friendly mash-up of political philosophy, absurdist humour and picaresque road movie featuring St Francis of Assisi and a talking Marxist crow among its many delights. **David Sutton** 9/10

THE FOREST

Icon Film Distribution, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)



When publicity for *The Forest* started doing the rounds, a few online do-gooders took against it, sight unseen of course, because it's a US horror film set in Japan's real-life Aokigahara Forest, a place where unhappy people go to top themselves. Basing a horror movie on a popular suicide spot is obviously deeply insensitive – much as *Texas Chainsaw* is a slap in the face for anyone who ever had an accident involving power tools – and it's probably an example of cultural appropriation, too, so clearly the film should never have been made. Well, I'll give the special snowflakes that much: *The Forest*, in which the charisma-free Natalie Dormer (*Game of Thrones*) travels to Japan to look for her missing twin sister in the eponymous woodland, should never have been made – because it's crap. I've had worse scares in my back garden. **DS** 2/10



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Dear FT...

letters

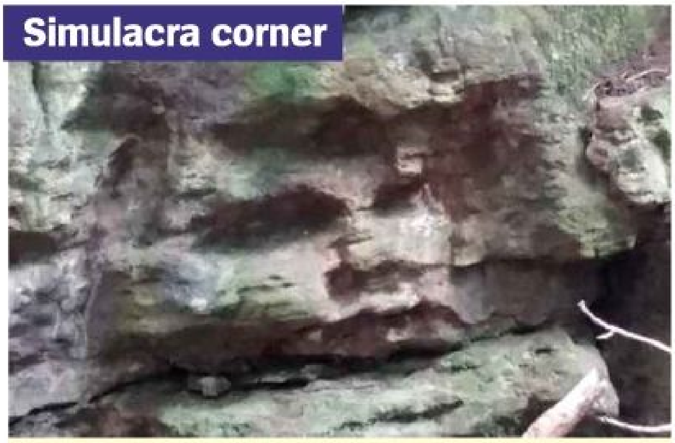
Tesla's reputation

Regarding the review of W Bernard Carlson's *Tesla – Inventor of the Electrical Age* **[FT338:62]**: the headline for the page was "An Illusionist inventor", while the next line stated "....and a boastful but failed inventor." Then reviewer David Hambling writes: "[Tesla's] lack of visible successes made him look like a chancer if not an outright fraud." Tesla invented the rotating magnetic field, AC motor, Tesla Coil as well as radio. Yes, no visible successes in that lot. He died a recluse because he was ripped off by Westinghouse in his contract.

Mike Williams
By email

*David Hambling responds: There's no denying Tesla became a major figure in the creation of the modern world when he designed the alternating current electricity supply system. As Carlson's biography makes clear, Tesla did have some early successes, though it would be a great exaggeration to say that he invented the rotating magnetic field or radio. While the Tesla Coil looks wonderful, it has limited practical application. In later years the gap between what Tesla claimed and what he delivered fostered this impression of "chancer if not outright fraud" (see my column "Tesla's towering folly", **FT340:14**) and this has done great harm to his reputation.*

Simulacra corner



Rob Sears spotted this rock troll face at Puzzlewood in Coleford, Gloucestershire. *We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.*

Borley organ music

Re Alan Murdie's account of ghostly organ music from Borley church **[FT341:18-19]**: alas, I fear we have to disregard any reports of unusual phenomena in the locked Borley church. When I visited on *the* night sometime in the 1970s, I found something resembling a Hell's Angels' jamboree (no wonder the locals were sick of it). We sojourned under a tree in the garden of the rectory with the 'nun's walk' in full view, but after it began to rain at about 4am the survivors transferred to the church porch. There I was told the secret of getting into the locked church. There was a side door into the chancel, bolted and hidden by a curtain on the inside. During the day as a casual sightseer you wandered past it and surreptitiously unbolted it behind the curtain. Whoever locked up the church never bothered to check that door, and you could then enter the church after hours at will. There was then the sound of breaking glass within the church. Screwing our courage to the sticking place, we left the porch and circled the church, only to find a freshly broken (stained glass) window on the opposite side. One of the other 'psychic investigators' had lobbed a stone through it. I have never been back.

Roger J Morgan
London

Pond slime

The rather chilling letter from Oliver Tate ('Pond slime?' **FT340:68**) might possibly describe a case of sarin poisoning. It seems that one symptom of this is a prodigious discharge of slime from the mouth and nose; it has been described as 'frogspawn'. Why this should happen to a single person in Brighton is of course unclear, but I understand that sarin is relatively easy to synthesise for someone with the requisite knowledge of chemistry. The challenge is staying alive during the process. We might speculate that a student of chemistry, or a bored teenager with access to the relevant information, could have tried to make a batch just for the hell of it. He might have used an eyedropper or similar to apply it to an arbitrary person (at a grave risk to himself, but not outside the bounds of possibility). This kind of thing happens from time to time. In 1982 a 16-year-old blew up the main train station in Oslo with a homemade bomb, for apparently no particular reason. One young girl was killed and several people seriously wounded. The station itself was out of commission for a long time.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

Lost worlds

With regard to Hei Sing Tso's Alien Origin theories **[FT342:74]**, there's Australopithecus and the One Brotherhood of Man Evolutionary Model to consider. However, what is interesting is that when it comes to archæology, there is a limit to what we can know, since (due to plate tectonics) a whole era of what could have been excavated has been gradually moved into the planet's molten core. If there were something technologically magnificent in the ancient past, we have little hope of physical evidence. So, while Holy Screeds from various cultures – with Ezekiel's Sky Wheels, Indra's Dart, Vimanas and the Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah – could be seen as merely melodramatic morality tales, how dismissive can we be? An oral history that's eventually been transcribed may have become distorted, but it would survive what plate tectonics can obscure over the aeons.

James Wright
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

Aerial rumbles

This morning I was listening to loud thunder and thinking about the obituary of Trevor J Constable **[FT341:24]** – and I had a silly thought. What if the cause of the sound of thunder we've all been taught (air slamming together after some has been vaporised by lightning) is wrong. What if instead it's the sound of Constable's sky critters' stomachs rumbling, because they are hungry?

Gary Yates
Ogden, Utah

Hollywood grifter

Having had a run-in with Randy Quaid when he was in Santa Barbara, I read Brian Robb's article **[FT340:32-37]** with some interest. However, one glaring error. Ronnie Lee Blakely, actress, was not murdered; Lee Bonnie Bakley was. The latter was a grifter, a con woman who made her living selling her photos and making promises of love and sex to lonely men. Her other occupation was attempting to trap a 'star' into marrying and/or supporting her. Her cover story, in order to obtain access to Hollywood types, was that she was an aspiring singer. For further details, try a simple search on the *LA Times* website, or follow the bibliography on the Wikipedia entry for her.

Rachel Hazard
McKinleyville, California

Erratum squared

The erratum correcting a mistake in a previous correction [**FT341:2**] says that the erroneous erratum was "possibly an FT first". However, there is an earlier example: in **FT331:2**, an erratum corrects a statement about the space shuttle *Challenger* [**FT328:5**]. Martin Stubbs and I were credited with spotting the error. You then went on to quote my email, but credited it to someone named "Bob".

Believe it or not, this isn't the first time I've been the victim of an error in an erratum. When my maternal grandmother died many years ago, an obituary in a small local newspaper misspelled my family name. After I pointed out the error, the paper printed a correction in which they not only misspelled my name a different way, but managed to misspell the original misspelling as well!

Bill (not Bob) Polaski
Mineola, New York

Spirit cats?

In a recent Ghostwatch column [**FT340:18**], Alan Murdie related two personal experiences, one concerning a black dog that may have been a Black Shuck-like portent of doom, and another a black panther (anomalous/alien big cat or ABC) seen at Avebury. He had considered that the big cat sighting might also be a bad omen, as following both occasions his companions who witnessed these animals suffered ill fortune and tragedy. He adds that the sighting of the dog, seen by his friend, could have been supernatural, but the cat he witnessed was definitely flesh and blood.

This article reminded me of Merrily Harpur's *Mystery Big Cats* [2006 – reviewed by John Michell, **FT212:64**]. At the time of publication there were around 1,200 ABC sightings in the UK per annum. I have been keeping a log of big cat sightings in East Anglia since 1995, but mainly covering Hertfordshire and Essex, as I live in Bishop's Stortford, which is on the cusp of those two counties. There have been more than 300 sightings in Hertfordshire and Essex alone. Even allowing for misidentification or hoaxes, there are a lot of sightings, and not all can be dismissed as mistaken identity or hoax.

There is a view that these cats are descendents of pets let loose after the Dangerous Wild Animals Act (1976) came into force as their keepers could no longer afford the licence fee or to look after them. Harpur disputes this idea, and concludes that these "mystery felines have been with us for much longer". The type of cat cannot be ascertained. Witnesses do their best to describe the animals, saying they are panther-like, or lynx-like, but there is typically part of the description that does not correspond to a known species. Are they hybrids? There are physiological reasons suggesting interbreeding would be difficult.

None has been caught, trapped, or shot – except for around a dozen small ABCs (leopard cats, lynxes, and jungle cats), [and Felicity, the Inverness puma – see **FT167:28-37** for a round-up] – and road kills disappear very quickly. Cats photographed in the wild on other continents are clear and species easily confirmed, but here in the UK, the photographs are always blurred and inconclusive.

Harpur says that some theorists believe that the phantom black dog of yesteryear was really a big cat, and the countrymen of the past, not expecting to see a big cat, would naturally assume the ABC was a dog. She suggests that these cats are in fact *daimons* – beings that bridge two worlds, the supernatural and our earthly world. [Her brother Patrick Harpur is the author of *Daimonic Reality: a Field Guide to the Otherworld* (Viking Arkana, 1994), a Jungian approach to forteana, reviewed **FT77:59**]. So in simple terms the cats are "spirit cats". That is why they shape-shift, and can appear and disappear. Murdie says that the cat he saw "seemed to melt into the hedge... then a little further down the beast emerged again... then disappeared into the hedge once more."

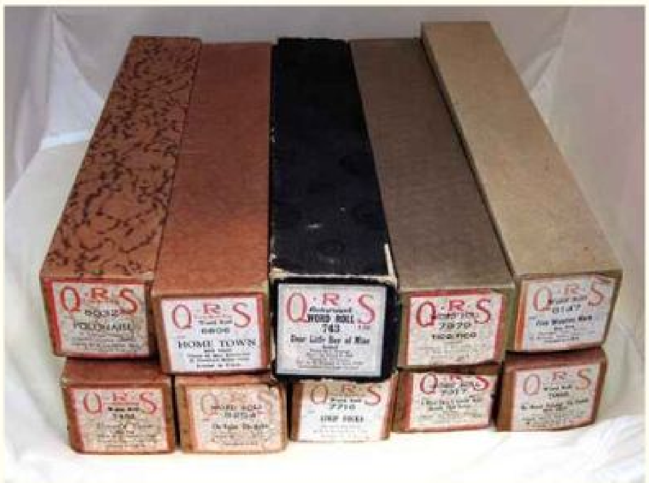
Charlie's boxes

I think I can identify the source of Charles Fort's 'shoe-box' filing system [**FT341:72**]. They look very much like the boxes used to store player-piano (pianola) rolls in the 1910s and 1920s. I recently bought one, with the perforated piano roll still inside, for just £1 at the amazing Musical Museum in griffin-haunted Brentford. There are hundreds of thousands of these still around, and I'm sure Fort would have had no trouble picking them up for next to nothing at the time. If Fort's notes are about 4.5cm square, I think the case is proven beyond doubt. Incidentally, the Musical Museum is a 'wunderkammer' in its own right, and will be of interest to any fortean.

John Rimmer,
Editor, Magonia Online

I remember my grandmother's vast collection of pianola roll boxes. They were made of thick, heavy cardboard, nearly always covered in black paper, sometimes decoratively embossed. They would have been about 15in (38cm) long and the lid fitted tightly over the entire box. To my surprise I find that they are still in production.

Karina Hudson
South Newington, Oxfordshire



Jim Steinmeyer, in his excellent biography, *Charles Fort – The Man who Invented the Supernatural* (Tarcher/Penguin, 2008, p.96) says Fort's boxes were of his own making: "Fort constructed dozens of small pasteboard boxes, simulating pigeonholes". His source is possibly an interview with Theodore Dreiser about Fort's notes, which he lists in his own notes.

Ulrich Magin
Hennef, Germany

Editor's note: Fort's home-made boxes belong to the period when he was writing short stories; it's possible that his later notes (for The Book of the Damned *etc) were gathered in pianola roll boxes. Incidentally, I suspect Steinmeyer's daft subtitle – "The Man who Invented the Supernatural" – was foisted on him by the publisher as an attention-grabber.*

*Lionel Beer, veteran ufologist, has told the Gang of Fort that he is sure Fort's boxes were for pianola rolls, as he too has some with matching lids, identical to those in the photograph we published [**FT324:54, 341:72**].*

THAT WAS WONDERFUL!

HUMPTY DUMPTY HAD A GREAT FALL

Australia and New Zealand do not have native big cats, but there have been ABC sightings there too, as well as in Holland, Ireland, Germany, and the French Alps. I personally don't subscribe to the view that the cats are *daimons*; on the other hand, I don't have an alternative theory of how they come to be here. Maybe Andrew Green was right that the cat sighting and the tragedy soon after was a coincidence; or maybe there is a synchronicity in the two events.

Jenni Kemp
(author of Haunted Bishop's Stortford)
Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire

Infectious

Professor Beaurigard [**FT340:76**] might have interested Aleister Crowley: in his 1929 novel *Moonchild* one sorcerer afflicts another with a cholera-like illness (p.184). On a lighter note, in my gap year in the 1980s, I worked as a clipster for a Liberal parliamentary candidate. One long-running story involved a St Albans kebab outlet. Its owner's name? Aziz Cholera (*sic*). Not ideal for the catering trade…

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

Rendlesham mystery

Following Jenny Randles's UFO Casebook piece (Genesis, Part Five, **FT340:28-29**) there seems little more to be said about the 1980 Rendlesham Forest affair. What at first appeared to be a genuine close encounter, and an answer to the thrilling question of whether there is intelligent life beyond Earth, soon unravelled into a mass of contradiction, confusion and denial. There remains of course the unexplained increased radiation in the area, while the idea that the beam of Orford Ness lighthouse was mistaken for a glow of alien technology is hardly worth consideration. Maybe the legendary governmental cover-up was applied and the US and/or British military knew more than they ever admitted; but after 36 years of inconclusive enquiries into witnesses' testimony given, varied, withdrawn and denied, this unusually complex case has, like most UFO investigations, gone nowhere and proved nothing. For both believers and deniers, very disappointing.

MG Sherlock
Colwyn Bay, North Wales

Don't panic!

One thing I have always noticed as a seismologist is that whenever there is a rush of earthquakes in a short time, people say, "Aren't there more earthquakes than usual?" – but whenever there is a protracted lull, you never get asked, "Aren't there *fewer* earthquakes than usual?" In any semi-random sequence it's to be expected that there will be peaks and troughs, and that is as true of earthquakes as anything else, but it's the peaks that get noticed. Of course, it's also true that most people have a poor idea of just how common earthquakes are. A strong earthquake in, say, Kamchatka, will be noticed by seismologists, but the media won't report it because it has so little human impact. People are also forgetful. So when speculation started up on social media regarding the coincidence of damaging earthquakes on successive days in Japan and Ecuador in April this year [see <https://theextinctionprotocol.wordpress.com/2016/04/17/why-is-the-planet-being-struck-by-so-many-large-earthquakes/>], all the previous incidences of earthquakes occurring within a short time interval were easily forgotten.

In practice, the chances of two major earthquakes on successive days are quite high. It's like the paradox of people at a party with the same birthday: given 23 people in a room, the chances that two will share a birthday are about even. The trick is that the *actual day* is not specified; obviously the probability that by chance you will have two people with a birthday on 20 May is very low. For any given year, the chance that one will get two independent major earthquakes on successive days at *some* point in the year is about 40 per cent, and a look at past records confirms that it is that high (it even happened twice in 2013, and again in 2014). Speculation following the Ecuador earthquake [7.8 magnitude, 20 April 2016] took a further turn when scare stories circulated that a seismologist in Colorado had predicted that huge earthquakes were imminent due to "current conditions". This is a good instance of how scientists get misquoted. What was actually said was that there was a strong potential for great earthquakes in the Himalayas due to current tectonic stresses (which is true, and something to be concerned about); but this was parlayed as though it was a prediction that the world was just about to become unzipped in a series of catastrophes. Caveat lector!

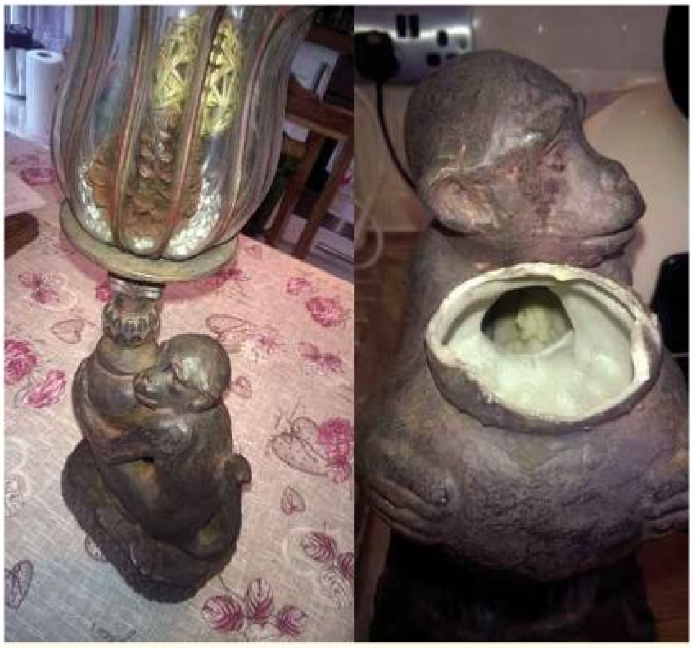
Roger Musson
Edinburgh, Scotland

Beer and squirrels

Regarding the banning of vinegar in pubs [**FT335:23, 337:72**]. I suspect this dates from the time when pubs or beer houses would brew beer on the premises. The bacteria that cause sugar or alcohol to oxidise and form acetic acid are airborne and can easily find their way into fermenting beer or wine if air is not excluded or equipment not properly sterilised. Vinegar can be made at home by exposing alcohol to the air. Commercially produced vinegar is pasteurised, but home-produced vinegar could have infected beer and caused it to sour and become unsalable.

Dean Smith's recollection of a bounty paid for squirrel tails [**FT337:72**] is also accurate, as there was an attempt to control grey squirrel numbers during WWII. In 1944, the County War Agricultural Committee issued free shotgun cartridges to registered Squirrel Shooting Clubs, but this had little effect on squirrel numbers. In 1953 a bonus system was introduced which paid one shilling and two free cartridges per grey squirrel tail. This was raised to two shillings in 1956, but abandoned two years later as trapping was shown to be a more effective form of control.

Gill Gough
Reading, Berkshire



Hidden Jesus

Many years ago I inherited a pair of monkey candlesticks from my partner's grandmother, who died at the age of 80. They had been in her house for over 40 years. One day Barley, my beagle, knocked one of them over and the top part broke off, revealing what appears to be a Jesus figurine attached to the inner wall. I don't know where the candlesticks came from and they have no markings. It would be interesting to know if anything was in the other candlestick, without breaking it. Maybe an X-ray would reveal something.

Andrew Randle
Upper Colwall, Herefordshire

it happened to me...

First-hand accounts from *Fortean Times* readers and posters at forum.forteantimes.com

The chocolate drinker

As a police inspector I was responsible for a large rural area in Anglesey, North Wales. At around midnight one day in mid-January a few years ago I was called to attend a serious incident at another police station. When I returned at 3am it had stopped snowing but there was a mantle of snow on the cars and the station yard. I assumed it had been quiet since midnight as there were no footprints or tyre marks in the snow. As I went through the general office to the sergeant's office, I could see the lower part of a policewoman walking upstairs to the canteen. I couldn't see all of her as part of the stairway was boarded. She was wearing Dr Marten's shoes, black tights and a black skirt and was quite muscular. I knew there wasn't a policewoman working a night shift, and casually asked the sergeant, "Who's the policewoman working tonight?"

The sergeant looked up from his desk, rather surprised. "Which policewoman? There's no PW working till the morning."

"But I've just seen one going upstairs."

"I don't think so sir, there's no PW working tonight, definite, just Constables Williams and Morgan and they're out on the town beat, and me on station duty. Where did you say you saw her?"

"Going upstairs. She must have gone past your door, there's no other way."

"There's definitely no PW working tonight. Pity."

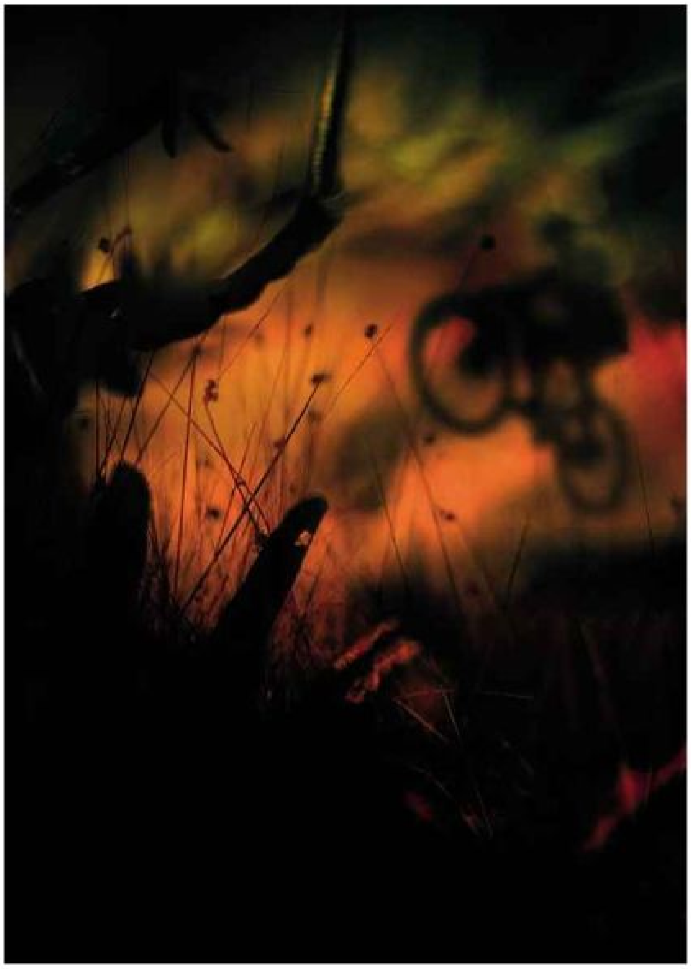
I couldn't believe it. What was going on? I was as sober as a judge. I went upstairs to check the canteen. There was no one there. However, on the table there was a mug containing powdered chocolate and sugar, and the electric kettle had just switched off. I checked the upstairs offices but there was no sign of anyone up there. I returned downstairs and asked the sergeant, "Since when have you been drinking chocolate?"

"God, that will be the day, I hate the stuff. Give me a coffee any day. Are you brewing up, sir?"

Later, before anyone else came into the police station, I returned to the canteen for refreshments and found that the chocolate had been drunk and the mug washed. I decided not to mention this to the sergeant. What would he think? An Inspector going round the bend? A little later, on going outside to my car, I saw a fresh set of footprints leading from the police station to the road. The sergeant hadn't been out.

Melvyn Griffiths

Llanfairpwll, Anglesey



ETIENNE GILFILLAN

Woodland fright

In 1960-61 my friends and I had a passion for what we called Tracker Bikes. These were stripped down pushbikes, which were ridden wildly down rough tracks, and we were constantly searching for new places to ride. One summer we discovered the ideal spot, a small wood just outside of town [Knutsford in Cheshire]. There was a circular track, and even a den already made from fallen branches. For the next few weeks we spent every moment we could riding in there, until we knew every twist and bend and bush in the wood – or thought we did. It was a considerable surprise when, one morning, we found an entrance to a path we had never noticed before. Naturally, we set off to explore it.

We seemed to be riding for a long time, until we came to a marshy patch where we had to carry our bikes. It was about then that we realised we were lost, and when we became aware of the stillness, the utter silence, with no bird song or sound of distant traffic. Then we heard an odd clicking sound. We pushed through the undergrowth until we found the source. In a clearing was a mound of reddish earth, sand or clay perhaps. On the summit of the mound was a dead tree, and the clicking sound was made by two branches banging together in the wind – *but there was no wind*. Thoroughly spooked, we could see glimpses of what seemed to be open fields not too far away. Crashing through brambles, we escaped, and found ourselves by a main road, a mile or so from the wood we had entered. When we got home there was a panic on. Although we thought we had been lost in the wood for perhaps two hours, it was nearly dark. We had been gone for 12 hours or so.

One morning, we found an entrance to a path we had never noticed before

I have told very few people about this. I have incorporated a fictionalised version in a novel, but it has never been published and only about four people have read it. I am very clear about which bits are fiction and which are not. I would not be writing this now if it had not been for Chris Pollard's article 'In the land of the Chaneques' [**FT339:42-46**], in which an oddly similar story is told. It involves bicycles, being lost in a wood that you thought you knew well, finding a mysterious tree, and escaping to find that many more hours have passed than you imagined. The only element missing from my experience was the little people in the tree (we don't have Caneques in Cheshire).

If this were a folktale, an account of something that happened once upon a time to a distant cousin of a friend of a friend, then the only mystery would be in understanding the methods by which such stories are spread around the world. But it is not a folktale, but something that really happened to me, and to Ana and her friends in Mexico. So what is going on? And if our experiences are in some way real, then how many other folktales, of phantom hitchhikers or alien/fairy abductions, have some kind of root in reality?

Tim Beswick

Saltburn by the Sea, North Yorkshire

Shuck as portent

There were only three occasions when our dog Rebel, a black Belgian shepherd, showed fear. The first was during a thunderstorm when he jumped on my stepfather's lap; the second was the only time I took him to the pub, which had a reputation for being haunted. The third time was one night in 1994.

The company I worked for was moving to new premises and there was a lot of overtime. I used to enjoy the drive in my Mini on the country roads. At 2am one night I turned the corner to my bungalow in Reepham, north Norfolk, and saw a big black dog. I wondered what Rebel was doing out at that time, but as I opened the front door I found him cowering and whimpering in the corner of the hallway outside my daughter's room. I had a smoke and a can of beer while Rebel settled himself down. He wouldn't go out for a walk though, which was unusual. I went to bed at three and was half asleep at 7.30 when the phone rang. It was my brother telling us his grandmother-in-law had died, as had her son when he heard the news.

I often think back to that morning and am sure that black dog was Shuck. Unfortunately, Rebel growled at my daughter and I had to rehome him. He was killed by a train on the day my son was born.

Chris Carling
Norwich, Norfolk

Minor weirdness

If there is a "god of small things" (to borrow the title of a novel by Arundhati Roy), in the field of the fortean/paranormal, that deity has certainly got my attention. That is because very minor yet inexplicable events have long been a part, and at times a minor bane, of my existence. The latter is especially true concerning the disappearance of small items, the time and trouble of replacing which could easily be valued above the monetary value of the item itself. For example: the other day when I returned home there was a CD case on the kitchen table, an unlikely place for me to have left it. The CD was the soundtrack for a film, *The Tree of Life*, but it was not in the case, nor in the CD player, nor on the table by itself; nor had anyone else been in the house that day. Another item that disappeared, on Christmas Day last, was a copy of the *New York Times*. This, and a local paper, had been placed in my daypack after purchasing both at a convenience store prior to taking a walk. But on my returning home (with no stops along the way) and unzipping the bag, the *NYT* was missing; only the local paper remained. There's lots more cases, going back many years.

The most recent odd incident involved a quite ordinary yet wildly improbable coincidence. For many years, the top of my jogging outfit in cool or chilly temperatures has been a crimson or scarlet anorak, an unlined synthetic pullover. No one has ever offered any comment on this garment until just the other day. As I waited in line at the service counter of a coffee shop, a man walking by through the aisle said, "I like your jacket, sir." Later that afternoon, soon after my jog around a local park had begun, another man driving by said, "I like your jacket."

Yet a third kind of minor, forteanesque incident in my life, somewhat over a year ago, once affected another person. These incidents were phantom insect bites – real bites, but from apparently non-existent insects. These happened to me a few times while sleeping, each time on the inner thigh or once on the forearm. These did not herald, thankfully, a full infestation and could not have been caused by a stray bedbug, because for myself a bite from these creatures is typically unforgettable, serious itching that can last for days, whereas these bites were not terribly uncomfortable. The other possible culprits – fleas, lice, or mosquitoes – did not seem very likely either, nor did this happen more than a few times.

However, the incident involving another person was rather odd. This casual acquaintance had stopped on his bicycle to hold a brief conversation after he saw me walking in a local park, near its artificial lake. Both of us were wearing shorts. This man then started to complain about being bitten on his bare legs by some sort of insect. But no flying insects were visible, nor did anything bite my own bare legs. No further incidents during sleep have occurred for many months.

Richard Porter
Denver, Colorado

Stark choice

I want to relate a very strange memory that I have preserved for 28 years. It is a memory that has tantalisingly unfolded increasing hints of meaning over the years and I believe has a possible connection with reports of kindly beings encountered in near-death experiences.

One day when I was in the school playground aged five, I was hit by a vivid recollection of an event that had taken place a good time before. I have preserved the memory of this recollection because it was so strong and positively layered with meaning that it has stuck with me. I have recounted it to a few people and a lot more frequently to myself. I am aware that human memory has been proven to be extremely unreliable, but I possess exceptional memory from my very early years (like, for example, my mother selling my cot to a kind lady before I was two) and I believe I have managed to preserve the essential details of this recollection with a high degree of accuracy. I can still see details, though they have faded a lot over time.

The recollection was of my being in a small, warm, dark, curved room that was lit by soft red light filtering through its walls. Two smiling, glowing female entities had come back to visit me. I knew that they knew I knew why they had returned. I knew that they had come to hear my decision. They were dressed all in white and I thought of them as nurses and related their appearance to the character Mrs White from Cluedo, though this parallel felt a little wrong to me as Mrs White has a red, rough face and – well – I can't recall their faces, but the idea of their being red and rough felt wrong to me, as did the nurse/cook uniform hats I recall their being dressed in: too clumsy/ungainly. But there they were patiently standing in front of me, smiling kindly and exuding power, goodness and 'professionalism' (for want of a better word). One or both them asked if I had made my choice.

I smiled back what felt like a good humoured, self-conscious grimace: again I knew that they knew, this time that I fully understood the terrible downsides to both of the options they had previously presented to me: I could either choose to have a fabulous childhood, then suffer a god-awful adulthood; *or* I could choose the reverse: a god-awful childhood followed by an adulthood in which I would have the world as my oyster. So I grimaced good-naturedly, knowing fully what I was letting myself in for, and replied, "There *is* no choice. I have to choose the bad childhood." I expect that the beings responded with some kindly, but all-powerful utterance like, "So be it!" But my recollection ceases at that point.

Well, I did have a very difficult time as a child, but was comforted through its course by my memory of this encounter and the promise it gave me of a kick-ass happy time to come once I reached adulthood. Over the years, as I have learnt things, I have applied various meanings to aspects of the recollection. The room it took place in, for example, seems indisputably womblike, though as a five-year-old I knew nothing about human reproduction or where babies came from. The white beings can easily be equated with angels, but I did not grow up in a religious family and, although my school had regular Christian assemblies and carol services (where I always, disappointingly, was cast as one of the tinsel-haloed angels at the back), I perceived the beings as nurses, not angels.

Did my exceptional ability to remember early events enable me to recall (and then preserve) a memory of something that – in some way – happens to all of us before we are born, but is normally forgotten, just as people don't generally remember being born? Does this preserved recollection suggest that the courses of our lives are set out before we are born?

I would be fascinated to hear what people think about all of this, especially if anyone else has experienced anything similar, or knows about other people who have – or if my experience fits any current theories about, well, stuff. I will happily provide more details if requested.

I am still waiting, with increasingly less optimism, for my kick-ass adulthood good fortune to start happening...

Lily —
By email

STRANGE AND SENSATIONAL STORIES FROM THE ILLUSTRATED POLICE NEWS

LAW COURTS AND WEEKLY RECORD.

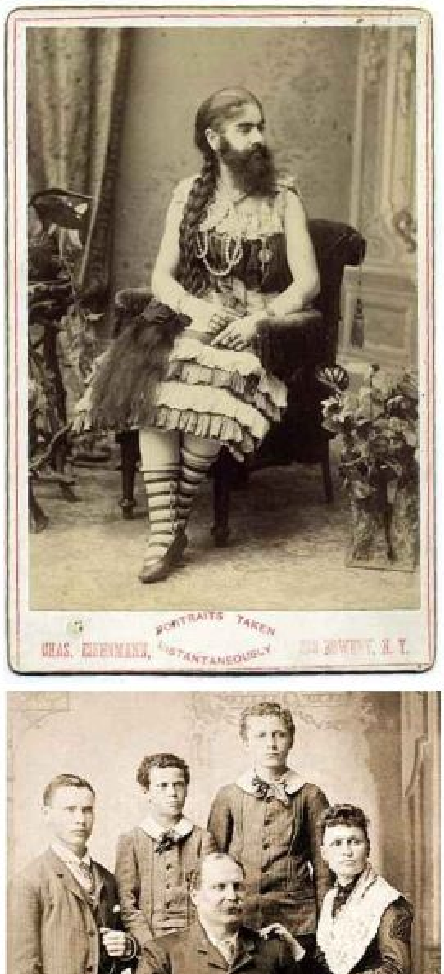
JAN BONDESON presents more stories from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News.*

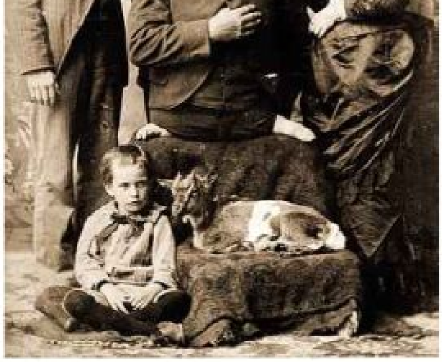
49. BARNUM'S FREAKS AND THEIR 1897 VISIT TO LONDON

Phineas Taylor Barnum, the great American showman, was born in 1810 (see **FT268:46-49**). His career began with a number of rather distasteful pranks, like the exhibition of Joice Heth, a blind woman said to be 160 years old and the nurse of George Washington; the Feejee Mermaid, made from the head and torso of a dried monkey and the rear part from a large fish; and the celebrated midget 'General Tom Thumb'. Barnum stockpiled his curiosities, both human and animal, at his American Museum in New York, but in 1865, the museum burnt to the ground. After another museum had also been ravaged by fire in 1868, Barnum's collection had been severely depleted, and he decided to start a new career.

A clever, business-minded man, he was soon the owner of PT Barnum's Travelling World's Fair, a large circus that toured the United States. In 1881, he joined forces with another circus magnate, James Bailey, to form Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth, a grand three-ring circus that outshone anything in the American entertainment world. It employed 370 circus performers, and had a large menagerie of elephants, horses, camels and other animals. Barnum was still fond of various newsworthy business deals, like purchasing the famous elephant Jumbo from the Zoological Society of London in 1882 (see **FT276:76**). Towards the end of his life, he became something of a philanthropist, settling down in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and supporting Tufts University and various other charitable causes. In spite of the odium caused by the purchase of Jumbo, Barnum was something of an anglophile, and one of the high points in his career came in 1889, when his circus performed at the Olympia in London.

Barnum suffered a stroke in 1890, and he died the following year. Although the great showman was now gone, Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth carried on without interruption, ably led by James Bailey and his colleagues. They found it profitable to visit London again in 1897, bringing all the performers, and a formidable menagerie of animals, with them to the Olympia. The Greatest Show on Earth also featured a large sideshow, in which various 'freaks' were exhibited; some of them had been with the circus for decades. When the sideshow was featured by the *Illustrated Police News* in 1897, some of the most celebrated performers were depicted. Most famous of them was Jo-Jo, the Dog-Faced Man, who had toured with Barnum since he was a youngster back in 1884. He was then called 'The Russian Dog-Faced Boy' and used to bark and growl at the audience. His real name was Fedor Jeftichejev, and he was a native of the province of Kostroma in Russia. As early as 1873 and 1874, he had already been exhibited for money in Belgium, France, and England, together with his equally hirsute father Adrian; they both suffered from an inherited form of excessive hairiness called hypertrichosis congenital lanuginosa. By 1897, Jo-Jo was a seasoned performer: the *IPN* journalist wrote that "his good-humoured face is covered with long silky hair, giving him the appearance of a Skye terrier." His remained unruffled when one of the sideshow 'rubes' asked him whether he had mislaid his razor, or inquired if he had paid the dog-tax, for the thousandth time. He was a great success when the circus went on to tour France in 1901 and 1902, going through his usual act on stage in front of the astonished Frenchmen. Jo-Jo died from pneumonia when the circus toured Greece in January 1904. (For more on Jo-Jo and other hirsute wonders, see **FT209:46-51; FT274:52-53.**)





TOP: Miss Annie Jones, the veteran bearded lady. **ABOVE:** Eli Bowen, the 'Half-Man' and family. **FACING PAGE:** Barnum's Freaks, from the *IPN*, 18 Dec 1897.

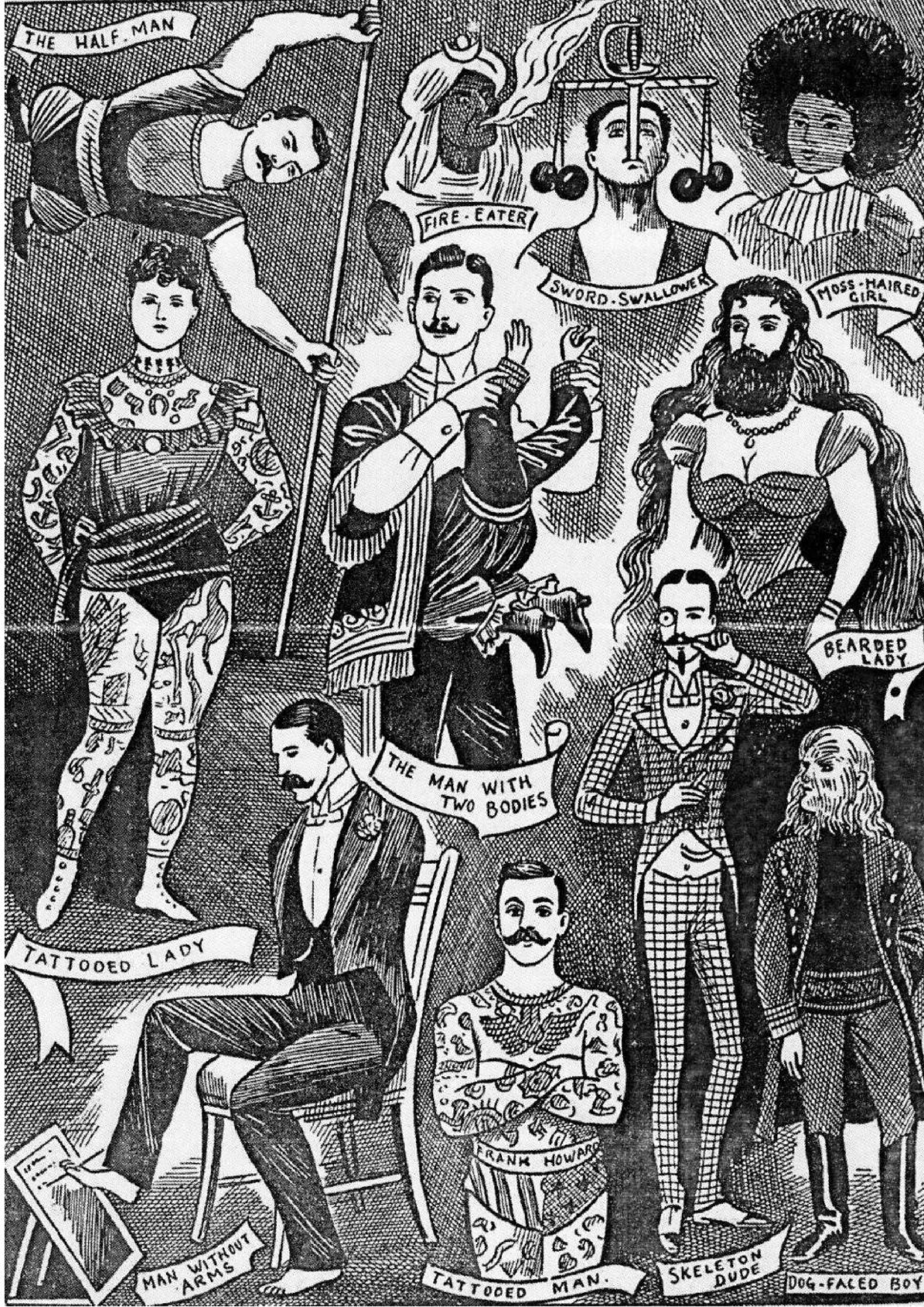
The other performers in the picture are also worthy of identification. The 'Skeleton Dude' was the abnormally thin James W Coffey, who was born in 1852 and began his exhibition career in the Chicago dime museums in 1884. He joined Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth in the 1890s, becoming a well-known personage in his elegant suit of clothes, with a monocle, long moustaches and a cigarette. He used to say that he would never marry, since "most women don't like their Coffey thin", but he did find the woman of his dreams in the late 1890s, and sired a healthy child. He then fell on hard times, being exhibited in various dime museums, and taking up palmistry with little success; the last we know of him is that he was taken care of by the city of Burlington, New Jersey.

The 'Man with Two Bodies' is the Indian Laloo, who had a headless parasitic twin growing from underneath his sternum. He was otherwise completely healthy, and got married in 1894. While performing with another circus in Mexico, he died in a train accident in 1905.

The 'Half-Man' is Eli Bowen, a veteran performer at the Greatest Show on Earth. Due to a birth defect known as phocomelia, he entirely lacked legs, but had a pair of feet protruding from his pelvis. Having learnt, from an early age, to use his arms and shoulders to compensate for his lack of legs, Bowen became a noted acrobat, performing with many circuses. He was sometimes teamed with the 'Armless Man' Charles Tripp, and there is a famous photograph with Bowen steering a tandem bicycle and Tripp sitting behind pedalling the machine. Bowen died in 1924, aged 79; Tripp lived on until 1939, when he was 84 years old.

There were many Tattooed Men and Ladies active in the sideshow business at this time, and the two depicted among Barnum's freaks were named Frank and Annie Howard.

Finally, there was "Miss Annie Jones, the amicable and accomplished bearded lady, whose glossy black hair reaches to her ankles". She was a veteran performer with the Greatest Show on Earth, having been exhibited for money since she was a child.


THE HALF-MAN
FIRE-EATER
SWORD-SWALLOWER
MOSS-HAIRED GIRL
TATTOOED LADY
THE MAN WITH TWO BODIES
BEARDED LADY
MAN WITHOUT ARMS
FRANK HOWARD
TATTOOED MAN.
SKELETON DUDE
DOG-FACED BOY

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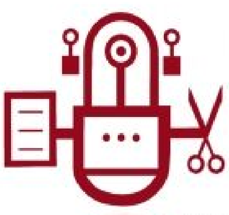

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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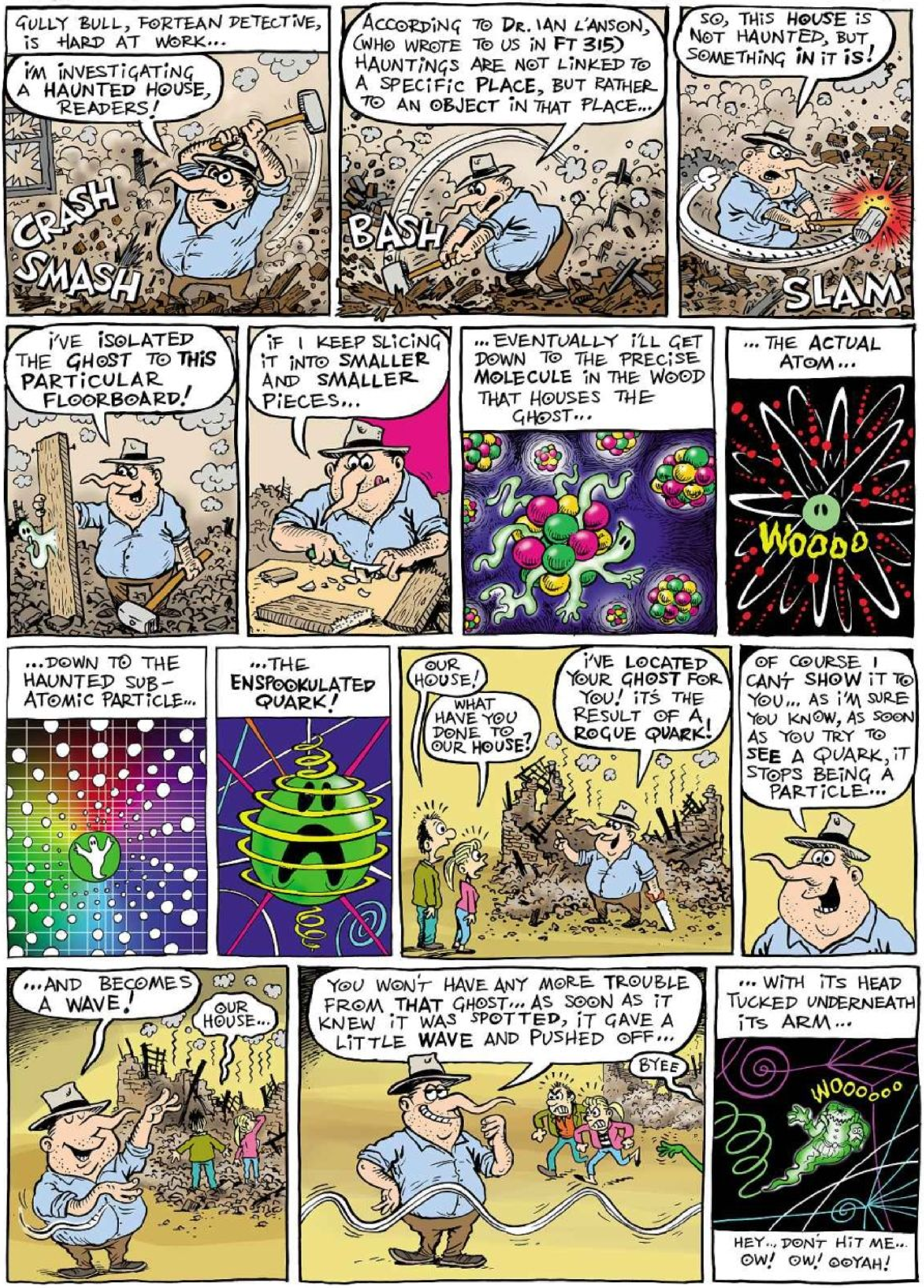
PHENOMENOMIX

HUNT EMERSON (with NILS ERIK GRANDE)


GULLY BULL, FORTEAN DETECTIVE, IS HARD AT WORK...
I'M INVESTIGATING A HAUNTED HOUSE, READERS!
CRASH
SMASH
ACCORDING TO DR. IAN L'ANSON, (WHO WROTE TO US IN FT 315) HAUNTINGS ARE NOT LINKED TO A SPECIFIC PLACE, BUT RATHER TO AN OBJECT IN THAT PLACE...
BASH
SO, THIS HOUSE IS NOT HAUNTED, BUT SOMETHING IN IT IS!
SLAM
I'VE ISOLATED THE GHOST TO THIS PARTICULAR FLOORBOARD!
IF I KEEP SLICING IT INTO SMALLER AND SMALLER PIECES...
...EVENTUALLY I'LL GET DOWN TO THE PRECISE MOLECULE IN THE WOOD THAT HOUSES THE GHOST...
...THE ACTUAL ATOM...
WOOOO
...DOWN TO THE HAUNTED SUB-ATOMIC PARTICLE...
...THE ENSPOOKULATED QUARK!
OUR HOUSE!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO OUR HOUSE?
I'VE LOCATED YOUR GHOST FOR YOU! IT'S THE RESULT OF A ROGUE QUARK!
OF COURSE I CAN'T SHOW IT TO YOU... AS I'M SURE YOU KNOW, AS SOON AS YOU TRY TO SEE A QUARK, IT STOPS BEING A PARTICLE...
...AND BECOMES A WAVE!
OUR HOUSE...
YOU WON'T HAVE ANY MORE TROUBLE FROM THAT GHOST... AS SOON AS IT KNEW IT WAS SPOTTED, IT GAVE A LITTLE WAVE AND PUSHED OFF...
BYEE
...WITH ITS HEAD TUCKED UNDERNEATH ITS ARM...
WOOOooo
HEY... DON'T HIT ME... OW! OW! OOYAH!

COMING NEXT MONTH

CONJURING ASIA

ORIENTALISM AND THE GOLDEN AGE OF MAGIC

THE LITTLE WIDOW

THE WEST HAM HORROR

BLOODY MURDERS AND MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCES

+

BIG CATS IN BRITAIN, MASONIC MYSTERIES, PRODIGIOUS BIRTHS, AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 344

ON SALE 18 AUG 2016

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A man was found dead inside the haunted house ride at Disneyland Paris on 2 April. The ride features zombies, a ghostly dog and a skeletal bride, and promises to turn visitors' stomachs with a series of "ghastly goings-on". The unnamed 45-year-old technician, who had worked at the park since 2002, was found by his colleagues in the Phantom Manor attraction just before the park opened to the public. He is believed to have been electrocuted while carrying out work on lighting. *ITV News, Sky News, 4 April 2016.*

A body found on a Brooklyn beach on 3 May had feet encased in hardened concrete. While "cement shoes", as they are known, have long been associated with organised crime and the Mafia in fictional depictions, several crime writers have said they believe this to be the first time they have actually been used in a murder – or at least the first time such a method has come to light. The victim, identified through his tattoos and a fingerprint as Peter Martinez, 28, was a member of the G-Stone Crips, a local street gang. He was wrapped in plastic bags, his head and hands covered in duct tape, and his feet submerged in more than 50lb (23kg) of concrete in a plastic bucket. Officials say he might have been asphyxiated, but further study is needed to determine a cause of death and how long he was in the water. Whoever killed him failed to wait for the cement to dry properly. It was filled with air bubbles, which might explain why the body wound up on the rocky shore near Kingsborough College.

Although feet encased in concrete has always been considered the stuff of legend, in August 1964 the body of Ernest Rupolo was found in New York's Jamaica Bay with two concrete blocks tied to his legs. And in 1941, the body of Philadelphia racketeer Johnnie Goodman was found by crab fisherman in a New Jersey creek, weighed down with a 40lb (18kg) block of concrete. *[AP] BBC News, 6 May 2016.*

After other black magic rituals failed to cure his wife's ailments, Yan Ingmar, 45, consented to the witchdoctors' wishes: she would be steamed alive until the "ghosts" were dispelled from her body. On 27 February, the two men who had been "treating" the woman proceeded to place her inside a wooden barrel suspended over a large vat of slowly boiling water. "She seemed OK at first," said Mr Yan, who lives in a remote village near Guangyuan in Sichuan province. As scalding hot vapour began to pass through the barrel, he was told to fetch a needle needed for the exorcism. "When I returned the screaming had begun," said Mr Yan. As his wife cried out in agony inside the barrel, he remonstrated with the two witchdoctors. "They said the ritual must be concluded, and that the screams from my wife was the sound of demons leaving her body," he said.

He stood and watched until his wife's cries became too much to bear. But after pulling her blackened body from the barrel and cradling her in his arms, he knew it was too late. "I looked at her face, and it was purple," said Mr Yan. "She told me she wouldn't make it." The pair of witchdoctors then ran away, but were later arrested. Mr Yan now lives in despair, trying to cope with the loss of the mother of his two children, and also the guilt that he was partly responsible for her death. "I really didn't have any other choice as I wanted my wife to be cured," he said. "I would have rather died than let this happen. How could I have intentionally killed my wife?" *D.Telegraph, 16 May 2016.*

Lottie Michelle Belk, 55, was killed by a flying beach parasol in Virginia Beach, Virginia. She had been talking to some children when a 25mph (40km/h) gust of wind blew the shade out of the sand. It was whipped through the air, hitting her in the chest and knocking her to the ground. She went into cardiac arrest and died in hospital. *[AP] Sun, 10 June 2016.*

On 20 April, a small airplane hit a bald eagle before crashing and bursting into flames just north of Anchorage, Alaska, killing all four people on board. Remains of the eagle were found on the plane's tail structure. It was the first civilian plane crash in the US to result in deaths after an impact with a bald eagle, the symbol of the nation, although there have been other crashes involving eagle strikes that resulted in serious injuries. An investigation will attempt to determine if the bird struck the Cessna 172 before or after it hit a 100ft (30m) spruce tree, which investigators determined to be the plane's initial impact point. The website of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game says Alaska has the largest population of bald eagles, which are found only in North America. It puts the Alaska bald eagle population at about 30,000 birds. *[AP] 4 May 2016.*

Ravi Subramanian, an Air India maintenance technician, died on 16 November after being sucked into an aircraft engine at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Savaii airport. Flight AI619 to Hyderabad, full of passengers, was being pushed back from the gate by a tow van when the co-pilot mistook a signal from ground staff and started the engine. The pilot and co-pilot have been suspended. *[AFP] 18 Dec 2015.*

Lim Narom, 46, was found dead in her home in Preach Vihear province, Cambodia, after choking on a fish she had accidentally swallowed whole while preparing dinner on 3 March. A police spokesman explained that she was scaling a batch of fish her husband had caught earlier in the day, adding that it was common practice to kill a fish by biting its head before scaling it. *Khmer Times, 4 Mar 2016.*

Roseann DiFrancisco, 86, was found dead in her bathroom in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania, by a visiting nurse on 15 February. She had apparently tripped and her medical-alert necklace caught on her walker and strangled her. Coroner Charles Hall said the lanyard got caught on the walker, causing the woman's upper torso to be suspended above the floor. The pressure on her neck then cut off air and blood flow. *(Victoria, BC) Times Colonist, 3 Mar 2016.*

Write Your Way To A New Career!

Writers Bureau Celebrates Twenty-seven Years of Helping New Writers

by Nick Daws

Hazel McHaffie

Tim Skelton

When distance-learning pioneer Ernest Metcalfe founded The Writers Bureau in the late 1980s, he can hardly have dared hope that twenty-seven years on it would be acknowledged as Britain's leading writing school. Yet so it proved, with thousands of Writers Bureau students seeing their work in print for the first time. And, for many of those who persevered with their writing, the dream of becoming a successful writer has turned into reality.

> *"My writing career took off exponentially."*

Students such as Tim Skelton. An engineer by profession, he had always harboured an ambition to write, and at the age of 40 signed up with The Writers Bureau. The decision changed his life: "My writing career took off exponentially. I started appearing regularly in lifestyle and in-flight magazines. The following year I was commissioned by Bradt Travel Guides to write a guidebook to Luxembourg. I've appeared in The Times and The Independent, and updated guidebooks for Fodor's, Thomas Cook, and the AA."

Another student who benefited was Hazel McHaffie. Hazel wanted to make her academic work in Medical Ethics more accessible to people, and decided to write the themes into novels. Following her Writers Bureau course, Hazel has had five novels published, and appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. She also has her own website at www.hazelmchaffie.com.

Sometimes studying with The Writers Bureau takes students down new and unexpected paths. Patricia Holness originally enrolled on The Writers Bureau's Writing for Children course. However, she soon realised that what she was learning applied to other types of writing as well.

She is now a full-time writer, regularly selling short stories for both children and adults. She also has a monthly column in Devon Life.

These are just a selection from the inspirational true stories from students of The Writers Bureau. There's no reason why YOU couldn't be their next success story. With a 15-day free trial and money-back guarantee, there is nothing to lose and potentially a whole new career to gain! So why not visit their website at www.writersbureau.com or call on Freephone 0800 856 2008 for more information?

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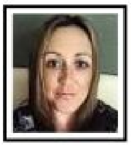

Rachel Dove "I won the 2015 Flirty Fiction Prima Magazine and Mills and Boon competition. The prize was **£500**, and the chance to work with Mills and Boon on my book which came out in April 2016.

"Also I have three stories in three anthologies with other authors – we've raised almost **£2,000** for cancer charities."

George Stewart "I am delighted to tell everyone that the course is everything it says on the tin, excellent! I have wanted to write for years, and this course took me by the hand and helped me turn my scribblings into something much more professional. I am delighted that my **writing is being published and I am actually being paid.** All thanks to the Comprehensive Creative Writing course."

Katherine Kavanagh "I have been publishing my own website for circus critique. This work has led to recognition in my field, with work offers ranging from writing book reviews for scholarly journals to running master classes for young people. I have had two paid writing residencies at festivals this year and have been employed to write tweets. Payments total **£2575**, plus expenses for travel, tickets to events and payments in kind in the form of review copy books."

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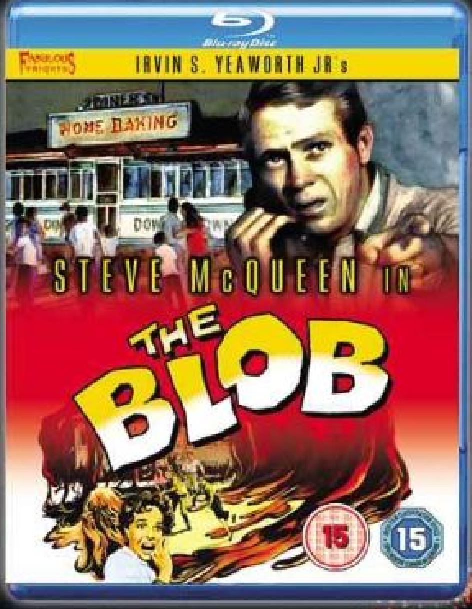
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